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THE MELBOURNE RING CYCLE 2013 OPERA AUSTRALIA



FREDRICK TÖBEN REPORTS – FOR ADELAIDE INSTITUTE



The opportunity of my attending *The Ring* a third time in Australia is made possible by those who understand!



Participating in a celebration of Richard Wagner's civilising achievement is an honour & privilege.



It is 15 minutes before the beginning of *Das Rheingold*



... and I reflect on meeting Wolfgang Wagner in 1997



... and I reflect on attending the three 1998 Adelaide Ring Cycles and meeting Eva Wagner-Pascherie and Richard Hornung, right. ...

....and also Lady Michele Renouf who thence became aware of the Revisionist cause.
... and I reflect on attending the 2004 Adelaide Ring Cycles and meeting [Conductor Asher Fisch](#)...



....and I recall how South Australia's Wagner Society's Brian Cogan had warned conductor Asher Fisch about Fredrick Töben and his dangerous ideas and activities – and Asher Fisch informed me he did not have any problems with the Adelaide Institute's website. There were consequences: I was prevented from renewing my 2005 membership with the South Australia Wagner Society! Fisch's aim was to perform Wagner's *Ring* in Jerusalem by 2010, which didn't happen.

Fisch delicately conducted the Ring orchestra and Elke Neidhardt, in Teutonic directness, directed the Ring. She died on 25 November on the day Götterdämmerung was performed in Melbourne where she resided.

I may also mention that Argentinian-born Jewish conductor [Daniel Barenboim](#) – married to the famous late cellist Jaqueline Duprey – stated a while ago that he would from now on only conduct Wagner.

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A skull-splitting Genius - das Jahrtausendgenie - created *Der Ring Des Nibelungen*

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Comments on Richard Wagner's magnificent epic tale *Der Ring Des Nibelungen*:

No wonder Wotan, who represents the Will, ultimately begins to long for the advent of a higher power the ideal man — to extricate the gods from their position! But not till the middle of The Ring does the highest order of all appear — the order of hero — in the person of Siegfried, who makes an end of dwarfs, giants, and gods; destroys the artificial rule of law, and inaugurates a new reign of freedom of thought. Such, in brief outline, is the message of The Ring. But, in truth, if one may put it frankly, very few musicians give any thought to the message of The Ring.

– J Cuthbert Hadden, *The Operas of Wagner*.

A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself within. The essential causes of Rome's decline lay in her people, her morals, her class struggle, her falling trade, her bureaucratic despotism, her stifling taxes, her consuming wars. The political causes of decay were rooted in one fact - that increasing despotism destroyed the citizen's civic sense, and dried up statesmanship at its source.

– Dr Will Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Vol.111.

In times of unrighteousness and disorder, women become corrupted; from the corruption of women comes the mixing of races; and from this comes all evil.
– *The Bhagavad Gita*.

Mordechai Vanunu

In 2004 Adelaide Institute dedicated its Ring Cycle report newsletter to Mordechai Vanunu because Richard Wagner's music was Vanunu's method of freedom. Vanunu writes:

The Israelis wanted to burn me. They tried to make me crazy, to discredit me. But I never cracked. I read, studied, listened to opera. For Yom Kippur I put on Wagner in my cell. This was my method of staying free, of showing them that I wasn't theirs and was, therefore, sturdy.

Vanunu:

Israel sparking an arms race

December 6, 2004 - 5:29AM

Nuclear whistleblower Mordechai Vanunu said that Israel's atomic weapons are pushing other countries in the Middle East to develop similar arms.

Vanunu also said that tensions over Iran's nuclear activities were linked to the Israeli arsenal.

Iran insists its nuclear program is strictly for the generation of electricity. But the United States suspects the Middle East nation has a secret program to develop nuclear weapons and has threatened to refer Iran to the UN Security Council for sanctions.

"Iran tried to put pressure on the world to deal with Israel," Vanunu told Sky News TV, defying an Israeli government order that bans him from talking to the media. Iran doesn't need, I think, atomic bombs, Iran doesn't want to fight any state with atomic bombs," he said. "But because the world (is) ignoring Israel, that pushes Iran and other states to try to be equal with Israel."



Israel has never admitted possessing nuclear weapons, maintaining a policy of ambiguity. However, based on pictures and information given by Vanunu to the London Sunday Times in the mid-80s, experts have determined that Israel has dozens, perhaps hundreds, of nuclear bombs.

Vanunu, 50, spent 18 years in prison after he was convicted of espionage and treason for supplying the photographs and documents. He is banned from leaving Israel.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said in July that Israel's right to weapons of deterrence - an oblique reference to the country's secret store of nuclear weapons - has US backing.

A European-drafted resolution passed by the International Atomic Energy Agency last week authorised the UN agency to monitor Iran's commitment to suspend uranium enrichment activities. Such enrichment can produce either low-grade fuel for nuclear reactors or the raw material for atomic weapons.

Vanunu also said he felt unsafe living in Israel, although he didn't specify what threat he faced. A convert to Christianity, he has been living at St George's Anglican Cathedral in Jerusalem since his release from jail in April.

"I don't feel safe, I don't feel free, the only place I can feel freedom and enjoy new life after 18 years will be far away from Israel, abroad in England, or in Europe, the United States," he told Sky News TV.

<http://www.smh.com.au/news/BreakingNews/Israels-parkinganarmsraceVanunu/2004/12/06/1102182176789.html>

And now fast forward to 5 December 2013:

***[South Africa's Nelson Mandela dies in Johannesburg](#)**

Mr Mandela led South Africa's transition from white-minority rule in the 1990s, after 27 years in prison for his political activities.

***[Mandela memorial sign language interpreter a 'fraud'](#)**

Here the death of an ex-terrorist/Communist is celebrated by the free & democratic and dictatorial world.

This would never have been possible in Germany where German self-hatred saw a desecration of the grave of a real peace-maker,



Selfie: Barack Obama and David Cameron pose for a picture with Denmark's Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt.

Rudolf Walter Richard Heß.

On 10 May 1941 Heß flew from Germany to Scotland on a peace mission but was arrested, and in 1946 the Nuremberg Military Tribunal convicted him of **crimes against peace and conspiracy** and handed down a life sentence.

On 17 August 1987 at age 93 he was murdered at Spandau Prison by British agents- in effect spending over 46 years in prison.



... and now it's time to get to work at Melbourne's Studley Park Yarra River cafe table where for many years John Bennett and I regularly met for coffee to discuss conspiratorial matters.

Remember, as soon as two individuals get together there is a conspiracy afoot, or simply put, it is an example of human nature at work - things are thought through, then discussed, and plans are smithied wherein individuals are invited to get things done. The mental world meets up with the physical world - the hand and the mind, the body-mind-soul synchronise to create life's events.

In his operas, and in the most abstract form, Richard Wagner gives expression to this creative process. It is in our self-interest to give meaning to the results of this gigantic creative impulse, which in itself becomes a fascinating and exhilarating task, i.e. to find the values that will sustain us even as life's hell-fire consumes us through this temporal journey of life.

Richard Wagner and **DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN**

Preliminary Comment

I had the pleasure of attending the first cycle of the first-ever Melbourne production of Wagner's four operas: on 18 November—*Das Rheingold*, 20 November—*Die Walküre*, 22 November—*Siegfried*, 25 November—*Götterdämmerung*, and it is thus difficult for me to be too critical about what I saw on stage and what I heard coming from the orchestra pit. The fact that Opera Australia staged *Der Ring des Nibelungen* is in itself an achievement, never mind dissecting it rationally whether it measures up to world standards or not.

Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk demands both visual and audio to be synchronised with the dramatic argument contained in the libretto. Yet, any dissonance from any of one of these three realms can then be compensated by the beauty and dramatic splendour of the others. If all three fail to elicit any response, then that's a performance disaster. In Wagner's own time such disasters did happen because his audience was not at all used to hearing such innovative music produced in a theatre. Such disasters did happen in Australia, in Sydney during the 1990s, for example, the production of *Der Fliegende Holländer* directed by Barrie Kosky was a visual disaster. But the audience then had the option to shut out the visual by closing their eyes and just listen to the music and let it instead move them through the drama.

Apparently this year's Wagner Bi-centennial production at its home-base in Bayreuth was an absolute disaster giving rise to a new concept: **Standing Buhvations**. The Frank Karstorf production is rigidly conceived and presented as a Marxist dialectic argument where decadence is the result of capitalist exploitation and the degradation of the human condition its result. Unfortunately, false consciousness, in the form of class thinking, cannot do justice to portraying the human condition.

I would have thought that Wagner's musical impulse does just the opposite and suggests to directors to do the opposite – to break out of such superimposed ideological shrouds. Karstorf, I think, would perhaps argue that he is trying to break out of the now stayed Bayreuth productions. After all, the last time such an event occurred was in 1976 when Patrice Chéreau and Pierre Boulez staged their Ring at Bayreuth.

Still, the problem remains: how to make Wagner relevant to a new generation. It certainly does not help in degrading its message where, for example, the sword becomes a machine gun. Eminent Wagner critic, John Deathridge, who attended the third cycle performances, informed me that this was a splendid idea, to give the Ring a current flavour. This reminds me of how Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* is seen by some to be a modern version of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

The continuous overarching narrative of the operatic text and music are an expression of the transcendence Wagner offers us and who solves it in a most endearing and positive fashion.

As Wagner was an avid Shakespeare fan, it can safely be stated that Wagner is as universal in his value-system as is Shakespeare. We need only go to that well-known **Othello** drama where Iago in typical enlightened rational hubris responds to the love-struck Roderigo who is thinking about suiciding:

'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners. So that if we will plant nettles or sow lettuce, set hyssop and weed up thyme, supply it with one gender of herbs or distract it with many—either to have it sterile with idleness, or manured with industry—why, the power and corrigible authority of this lies in our wills. If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most prepost'rous conclusions. But we have reason to cool our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts. Whereof I take this that you call love to be a sect or scion.

Both Shakespeare and Wagner were living to the full, standing within a political atmosphere, so to speak, but both transcended their immediate environment, which is reflected in their creative output and wherein lie those timeless values that dialectic materialism cannot even fathom. Marxist-inspired individuals reject the notion of love, and the truth concept, and to fill the void that inevitably opens up in their deconstructionist bundle of values is the challenge such individuals face when confronted with Wagner's Gesamtkunstwerk. For example, the feelings collectively bundled under the concept love are, as Freud would also agree, a mere matter of sex and lust needing self-expression. Little wonder then that such Marxist-inspired directors have their view of life reflected in what they put on stage, and as I was informed by a Marxist in Berlin during 1997: 'the semen must flow...'. For them, all human activity and yearnings can be reduced to the physical sexual act. Such theorists cannot even contemplate and reflect on any of the multitude of values that make up the concept of love, or to accept that human relationships are multi-dimensional and cannot thus be reduced and explained by referring to a simple process in terms of dialectic materialism.

Now to the evaluation of the operas, which means putting aside as much as possible any preconceived personal dispositions and to face the productions with a mindset that will enable them to speak for themselves. After all, true works of art need no interpreter, and that is why Wagner's stage directions ought to be followed in some detail.

DAS RHEINGOLD

18 November 2013 – approx. 2.40 hours

From the River Rhein, from the primordial depths of Creation, emerges a reverberating orchestral sound that heralds life in its most innocent form, three maidens joyously and carefree playing – until Alberich comes along and desires their intimate attention. On stage this act of creation becomes visible on a revolving disc that covers the whole stage filled with writhing bodies of all gender, shapes and sizes and mostly dressed in swimwear. Their slitherings are magnified by a huge suspended mirror above them.

Then the Rhein maidens emerge therefrom – Woglinde-Lorina Gore, Wellgunde-Jane Ede and Flosshilde-Dominica Matthews – dressed in a Moulin Rouge-type costume with a feathery outfit covering their heads. Their 'Weia!, Waga!' – this babbling pre-language communication is somehow lost by the visual frivolity presented on stage. We have here the Sea of Humanity with a kind of Australian twist, suggesting perhaps that our beach culture prevents us from reaching greater cultural heights of understanding.

Alberich-Warwick Fyfe appears in business suit until he strips to his underwear and attempts to woo the maidens. This scene succeeds in conveying the frustration, the agony, of the process that an individual has to go through in order to make sense of life. Alberich does not play the victim and does not develop victimhood as his moral guiding principle. Instead, he begins to think how to outwit the Rhein maidens and instead of desiring them he switches tact and desires their gold, which he successfully steals from them. As Andrew Gray clearly stated, it is at this point that Wagner suggests humans develop their self-reflective intelligence to overcome physical clumsiness, which Fyfe portrays so well.

We have here the first of a number of messages that Wagner sends out about love and power. There is a German maxim: *Liebe macht machtlos* – love makes you powerless. I wonder if it is a coincidence that during this Ring cycle the national broadcaster ABC TV screened the four-part series of Kerry O'Brien interviewing former Prime Minister, Paul Keating. Much was made in the television promos how Keating stressed again and again that he lusted for power, and which he ultimately achieved at the expense of Bob Hawke's personal effectiveness.

When Alberich steals the gold there is a nice visual effect of the Rainbow Girls – who later appear again simulating the path to Valhalla – creating a glittering sea of gold by waving their wands about, and from which Alberich snatches a child and carries it off on his back. I wondered whether this was an allusion to the Victorian and national Royal Commission Enquiry into child abuse at various religious and state institutions in

Australia throughout the past 50 years. The equation of gold and children did not work for me.

The next scene opens with that startling central stage dangling giraffe, and other animals caged in boxes – a zebra, a leopard?, and even a Tasmanian tiger! As with the opening scene of the Sea of Humanity, this also did not work into the musical message. In fact, such subsequent scenes are too contemporary because they remind us of the television shows *The X-Factor* and *Australia has Talent*, where all too often the visual overwhelms, even overpowers, the vocal delivery, thereby enabling individuals to be judged 'talented' when in fact such is glossed over by the very visual effects that ought to augment any vocal and dramatic delivery and not be its primary focus.

Wotan-Terje Stensvold and Fricka-Jacqueline Dark, and Freia-Hyeseoung Kwon appear in period dress where women, for example, still wore a fox-fur stole as did Fricka. Wotan does not wear that obligatory eye-patch to hide the loss of his left eye after having drunk from the spring of eternal knowledge, and instead, he is wearing a see-through eye patch. Both Stensvold and Dark have the necessary stage presence that also gives them the vocal strength to convincingly carry the action forward. This was not the case with Kwon who lacked conviction in her singing. Technically it was fine in pronunciation but there was just a lack of passion in delivery, almost coming close to total passivity.

A delightful moment occurs on stage when the giants, Fafner-Jud Arthur and Fasolt-Daniel Sumegi, come to collect their pay for having completed building Valhalla. From behind a backstage screen that opens up the two giants are revealed each standing in a cherry picker that is then lowered to the ground – and the wranglings begin to seize Freia as payment for their labour. I thought that this would resonate well with the Melbourne audience who would easily associate the giants with Wheeler the Wrecker or the Grollo Brothers' work. Their appearance in suits and sunglasses brings their image closer to gangsterism.

A delightful Loge-Richard Berkeley-Steele appears in his glittering silvery suit, which accentuates his shifty nature and makes him a perfect schemer as to how the gold can be stolen from Alberich so that Freia can be freed from the giants. Both Loge and Wotan visit Nibelheim where they meet Alberich and his brother Mime-Graeme Macfarlane, and the whole workforce made up of Opera Australia Chorus and volunteers. It must be noted, as is typical of the Australian spirit, voluntarism is a large factor within our social fabric.

A novel way of presenting Alberich's transformation into a serpent and toad is achieved by placing on stage a magician's box on which is written TARNHELM. A magician and assistant open the door and Alberich

walks inside, the box is spun around and out the opposite door emerges the assistant with a large snake-python wrapped around her body. This image fails here, but in the next change a rubbery toad appears. Then, once captured by Loge and carried out of Nibelheim, Alberich appears in full dress with both hands and feet shackled by a rope.

Unfortunately at the first transformation to a dragon the musical score at this point is far too dramatic, and this visual dissonance highlights an adjustment problem. In this otherwise dramatically charged atmosphere the visual presentation offered relief through comic effect, but 33-year-old conductor Pietari Inkinen sustained it throughout the scene by even letting tubas, trumpets and trombones give their fullest – in any case, Wagner was not a man of half measure either. All the same, in order to make this instant transformation relevant to today's audience that is fully aware of instant communications, this magician's box succeeds in illustrating the power of the Tarnhelm.

Once the almost countless gold bars are brought to the surface the music heralds the return of Fafner and Fasolt as announced by Loge whose brothers Froh-Andrew Brunsdon, and Donner-Andrew Moran appear with Wotan and Fricka, all of whom are joyously expecting Freia's release. After all, she provides them with the apple of youth, without which they would all die. But Wotan is not so easily tricked out of his new-won fortune and the giants strike a hard bargain: Not until they receive all the gold will they release Freia, and Loge reminds Wotan he had promised the Rhein maidens that their gold would be returned.

Unfortunately Fasolt is madly in love with Freia and refuses to let her go until all of her is covered with gold, and so Loge throws the Tarnhelm at a gap in the wall of gold. After some wranglings with the giants where Loge suggests that it is Wotan who will return the gold to its rightful owners – the Rhein maidens – Wotan begins to rage and exclaims he will never give up the ring.

[This theme of yearning fleshly delights is again picked up later by Richard Strauss in his opera *Salome* where Herod promises Salome any riches in order to see her dance – she, of course, seeks Jochanan's head while Wagner's characters see reason and act accordingly – much to their downfall?]

Wotan wants to be left alone and rejects being pressured by Froh and Donner, but then it is Erda-Deborah Humble who appears and asks Wotan to give up the ring because it is cursed. Wotan doesn't know this "Weib" and she explains that she knows everything – past, present, future. She bore three daughters before time began – the Norns that we are to meet at the beginning of *Götterdämmerung*. Erda continues: 'What I see they [the Norns] show you as you slumber' and 'All things that are, perish. A bleak day dawns for the immortals. Give up the ring', she bids Wotan.

In this production Erda, dressed in a white business suit, appears as a blind woman tapping her way on

stage to deliver this message to Wotan. Somehow the gravity of what she is saying fails to grip, though, again considering the aim of this production is to make Wagner accessible to a non-Wagnerian audience, it fits into the Sea of Humanity image at the beginning. Her blindness perhaps enables her to see much more clearly with the inner eye, without having visual distractions to worry about. In any case Deborah Humble's full and beautiful voice glossed over any visual blemishes we saw on stage.

It is Fafner who oversees that his beloved Freia will totally be covered by the gold – and a slight gap is then filled with the golden ring on Wotan's finger. That's how the Gods lose their wealth and regain their youthfulness.

But now Fafner and Fasolt begin to quarrel over the spoils and Fasolt kills Fafner because as far as he is concerned Fafner desired Freia more than the gold. They had called upon the Gods to make it an equal share. Loge advises them that it's only the ring that's important. Fasolt then arranges the gold bars around his brother's lifeless body, then puts on the Tarnhelm, which is just a large ring that fits on his head. I wondered why a helmet had been turned into a secondary symbol of the RING. The way in which Alberich handled it, it seemed to suggest that it is a kind of halo contraption.

Fricka invites Wotan not to visit Erda but instead to go to splendid Valhalla, which as far as Wotan is concerned has been obtained at a terrible price. Then Donner's 'Heda! Heda! Hedo!' clears the depressing atmosphere created by the full-blown moral dilemma facing Wotan. Unfortunately there is an absolute mismatch when Donner waves his pistol about in lieu of his usual hammer.

Conductor Pietari Inkinen revves up the orchestra, with especially the brass instruments going flat out, as they have been since the beginning of the performance. Although some individuals sitting in the front rows of the State Theatre auditorium felt the brass section was too loud, I can feel for all those musicians who came from Europe and from various orchestras to participate in this 130-piece special Melbourne Ring orchestra, especially for the Wagner Tuba player, for whom this was also a once in a lifetime performance, and of course as well for all players and concert master, Roger Jonsson.

As Loge delivers his premonition that things are not going according to Wotan's plans, that he would not mind setting the whole show on fire, the Rhein maidens lament the folly of those who deceive because for them virtue and truth live on in the water.

Such profound thoughts are best expressed on stage in a minimalist way and not with a countless bunch of feather-fluffing Rainbow girls strutting their stuff. This is pop-music show business of the feel-good kind found in abundance on today's numerous television stations.

There is nothing in such visually choreographed scene that links the profound message contained in *Rheingold* with the music and with the libretto. What director Neil Armfield attempted to achieve by including such costume-splendid but meaningless scene may have been motivated to what I alluded to earlier – making *The Ring* accessible to an audience totally devoid of a

DIE WALKÜRE

20 November 2013 – approx. 4 hours

In contrast to *Das Rheingold*, which runs continuously for just over two and a half hours, *Die Walküre* divides into three acts, with two breaks of ninety minutes and thirty minutes respectively. The first interval is in effect a dinner break and the second a coffee break. It also began at five in the afternoon but ended just over an hour after *Rheingold* had concluded, around 10.30pm. Many patrons utilised the food and drink facilities that were offered, from take-aways outside of the theatre to the internal venues beginning with *Brünnhilde*, Wotan, Siegfried and Gunther.

As the curtain rises the stage reveals a small wooded hut standing on the slowly revolving stage floor, with paper snow fluttering down a very effective evocation of winter-time. Siegmund-Stuart Skelton literally stumbled on stage and the revolving hut comes to a standstill to reveal a contemplative Sieglinde-Miriam Gordon-Stewart sitting on a bench inside. Siegmund's monologue splendidly conveys his escape from a hot pursuit, which immediately endears him to Sieglinde who lives in a forced loveless marriage to Hunding-Jud Arthur.

As Sieglinde hands Siegmund a drink their eyes meet and their tragic attraction begins its inevitable destructive course, something beautifully conveyed by both in voice and demeanour and orchestration. It is a truly genuine portrayal of first love on stage.

Hunding's return, and his offer of a truce to Siegmund, pauses this dramatic moment where brother and sister discover each other's identity. Hunding draws a curtain within the hut and disappears. Soon after Sieglinde emerges and advises Siegmund she has drugged her husband, and now the lovers together can escape into the forest.

Sieglinde also informs him that a stranger, the Wanderer-Wotan, had lodged a sword in the ash tree, which Siegmund effortlessly pulls out of the tree trunk. Unfortunately this scene is done in a minimalist way and thus the barrenness does not evoke the dramatic narrative's full sense – there was no tree on stage and the sword could barely be seen because it was more of a rapier than a full-sized sword.

Fortunately Neil Armfield's minimalist approach worked better in Act Two that begins with a huge centre-stage spiral staircase – no doubt leading to Valhalla. I heard some patrons ridiculing this structure because it

knowledge of heavy Wagner stuff! All the same, as is inevitable, the created music covered such blemishes, even covering for itself when volume and pace and pitch were not synchronised. Yearningly we anticipate the continuation of *Der Ring Des Nibelungen* and its second opera, *Die Walküre*.

reminded them of a parking lot ramp. Also, the *Rheingold* animals appeared again but this time all suspended and dangling from within the shaft around which the stairway to Valhalla is built. I think the Tasmanian Devil was also there again.

Brünnhilde-Susan Bullock saunters down the stairway with boyish exuberance, which reminds me of the overt physicality that is so evident among artists performing on *The X-Factor* or *Australia has Talent* television shows.

I noted this also later in the Wood Bird-Taryn Fiebig, where perfect voice technicality but unconvincing depth of feeling is lacking thereby not conveying the deeper meaning of a portrayed situation. All too often, as in Brünnhilde's case, the overt physicality distracts from the dramatic moments created by the music and the dialogue. I could not get used to her continued stooping as she engaged with Wotan.

Fricka-Jacqueline Dark, in contrast, emerges as a dignified and steadfast individual who highlights Brünnhilde's lack of conviction. Her confrontation with her husband, Wotan-Terje Stensvold, is superbly presented and her defence of the sanctity of marriage and condemnation of incest has Wotan personally agonising about his role in upholding the law. His favourite daughter, Brünnhilde, seeks to protect Siegmund in that forthcoming battle with Hunding, and so she becomes a disobedient daughter – this dramatic encounter is not reflected in her vocal delivery.

When these men finally meet it is Wotan who intervenes and smashes Siegmund's sword thus enabling Hunding to kill Siegmund, which infuriates Wotan who then with a sweep of his right arm towards Hunding kills him. Again, Wotan's action and voice is fully synchronised with the music thus making it a tense dramatic highlight of the evening.

By now Brünnhilde has also gathered up the broken sword and has escaped with Sieglinde who we are informed is now expecting a child from Siegmund, which will be dealt with in the third opera, *Siegfried*.

Act Three begins with the now famous *Ride of the Walkyrie* and conductor Pietari Inkinen gives the orchestra its full power, which later enables him to create moments of much-needed softness and delicacy as Wotan agonisingly farewells his beloved disobedient

daughter and places her on a rock encircled by a ring of fire.

She is thereby banished from ever again serving Wotan and now only a hero can wake her from this sleep as will happen in *Siegfried*, where she joins the human race. This whole scene is unappealing for anyone who seeks to see physical action on the stage because in this unfolding moral dilemma the action is in the head and the music expresses so deeply this traumatic moment. Placing Brünnhilde within a live gas flame could not be more realistically done but I wondered whether the flame did not generate too much heat for her – apparently not.

SIEGFRIED

22 November 2013 – approx. 4 hours

The curtain rises and Siegfried-Stefan Vinke is sitting on a double-bunk bed with child-like drawings pinned to the wall while Mime-Graeme Macfarlane smithies away next to him in the forge. It's a realistic setting that creates the right atmosphere wherein Mime gives Siegfried the information he wishes to know about how it came to pass that Mime raised him.

Mime is frustrated in that he cannot re-forged the sword Nothung, which once belonged to Siegfried's father, Siegmund; and when Wotan as The Wanderer-Terje Stensvold enters, more is revealed: Only a fearless person can reforge Nothung, which then Siegfried does. The interaction between the Wanderer and Mime, especially during their riddle session, is well done. We hear more of what happened to Wotan, carving himself a spear from the world ash tree – and, more importantly for Mime, that if the dragon is killed, then the Rheingold treasure will be his. Both Mime and Siegfried rejoice when Nothung is finally forged.

Although startling and rather original in its setting Act Two begins with the foreboding dragon music. The stage setting reveals the inside of the cave with a man sitting at a make-up desk and his full face projected on a giant screen that actually dwarfs the man himself. As Fafner-Jud Arthur begins to apply make-up on his face, regularly grimacing, it reminded me of the *Wizard of Oz* where the wizard also has his fearful face projected on to a screen.

Then the stage revolves and reveals the outside of the cave entrance. Alberich, who is guarding the entrance to the cave, sees the Wanderer approaching and calls him a villain and thief. The Wanderer informs Alberich that he, the Wanderer, is here not to meddle in earthly affairs but merely to watch over them, and he informs him that Mime will bring Siegfried along who will kill the dragon.

The argument here is again questioning our own mortality: Alberich steals the gold from the Rhein maidens, then Wotan steals the gold to pay the giants for building Valhalla. The giants fall out with each other

Sadly, I have a problem with the Walküren who enter per suspended rope ladders, which then double up when they transport the heroes fallen in battle to Valhalla. One of these hoists to heaven remained empty because somehow the harness holding the person malfunctioned. Still, it was a novel way of transporting heroes.

All the Walküren: Gerhilde-Anke Hoppner, Schwertleite-Dominica Matthews, Ortlinde-Merlyn Quaife, Waltraute-Deborah Humble, Helmwig-Hyeseoung Kwon, Siegrune-Sian Pendry, Grimgerde-ElisabethCampbell, Rossweisse-Roxane Hislop, are represented as modern day feminists, if not outright gay rights activists.

and Fafner kills Fasolt, and now hides in the cave watching over the gold and doing nothing with it, while Alberich yearns for it by standing guard outside the cave.

The richness of voices and orchestra blend well in this scene and clearly capture Alberich's desire of doing something with the ring – to rule the world. And to Alberich's anxious question whether he would interfere the Wanderer responds: 'Wen ich liebe, lass' ich fuer sich gewaehren; er steh' oder fall', sein Herr ist er: Helden nur können mir frommen' – 'Whom I love I leave to fend for himself; he stands or falls, but is his own master: I avail myself of heroes.'

The Wanderer awakens Fafner who will not enter into any bargain to hand over the ring to Alberich so as to avoid being killed by Siegfried. Then as the orchestra begins the strains of a Rheingold motive the Wanderer sings: 'Alles in der Natur nach seiner Art. An ihr wirst Du nichts ändern' – 'Everything in nature follows its own course. You cannot change that.'

When Mime and Siegfried arrive in the forest there is again more questioning of basics – who is Siegfried's father and mother. Today's politically correct movement will surely be offended by asking such fundamental questions – Siegfried hates Mime because he does not look like him! The Woodbird arrives and gives him some relief from his ignorance. But Siegfried's horn playing also awakens Fafner.

Sadly, when Siegfried kills the Dragon, blood-drenched and stark-naked Fafner emerges from the cave's entrance. I wondered then whether Fafner would have been circumcised or not! This scene does not work for me and I was surprised for whom it did work – a couple of elderly ladies during interval were enthralled by it.

Act Three begins with the Wanderer visiting Erda with whom he had children – all the Walküren. That she appears, roused from her 'wisdom dream', in a wheelchair, is perhaps designed to accentuate the fragility of 'Erda, Ewiges Weib – eternal woman'.

This act contains for me the decisive message of the whole Ring: Temporal power expressed in generational change. Wotan attempts to stop Siegfried from reaching Brünnhilde, the daughter whom Wotan has banished and who now will be rescued by that prophetic fearless hero. 'Geh hin. Ich kann Dich nicht halten' – 'Pass on. I cannot stop you', says Wotan and contemplates his own mortality as a God. The drive for Siegfried to find a wife is a fearless expression of the biological imperative with all the social and other consequences it entails.

And so Siegfried finds Brünnhilde, but she is boxed up as were the animals before her in an earlier opera, and this destroys the continuity of the ring-of-fire image

GÖTTERDÄMMERUNG

25 November 2013 – approx. 4.30 hours

The final opera in this tetralogy, as is the case in the preceding two operas, there are also three acts but introduced by a Prologue that serves well to set the scene for the final catastrophe. The Prologue and First Act together run for two hours before the break, and its action is an emotional roller-coaster of a ride beginning with Erda's daughters, the three Norns – Elizabeth Campbell, Jaqueline Dark and Anke Höppner spinning the rope of Fate.

This scene succeeds in conveying the allegorical, the mythical nature of this story by having hanging drapes as an effective backdrop. As the Alberich curse figuratively throws a spanner in their works, the rope snaps, the maidens disappear, and the scene blends to where Brünnhilde and Siegfried are frolicking around, still enjoying their new-found love on a bare mattress. I asked myself why would a cheap mattress trick be needed if one wishes to convey the beauties of first love – it cheapens the atmosphere, in fact almost ridiculing it.

Brünnhilde wants him to do more than just sit around at home, and so Siegfried is off to do heroic deeds. He gives Brünnhilde his ring, the Nibelung Ring, as a token of their love. When Brünnhilde is warned of the coming plot against her by a Walküre who ventures down to also warn her of things falling apart at Valhalla – she says the Walküre are now aimlessly wandering about since Wotan returned with a broken staff – Brünnhilde regards her pending fate as Wotan still extracting revenge on her initial act of disobedience towards him when she wanted to save Siegmund's life.

Act One reveals a shed-like structure, more like a large open Oktoberfest tent where we find Gunther-Barry Ryan, the Gibichung king sitting together with his sister Guttrune-Sharon Prero. It is noted in the text that both are unmarried and both are looking for a mate. Gunther seeks advice from their half-brother, Hagen-Daniel Sumegi about finding a way how to consolidate their power. Hagen, the son of Alberich, of course, still wants the Nibelung Ring, which now Brünnhilde is wearing, and that his father still claims as his. The plot thickens when Siegfried arrives and is given a drink that makes

that Wotan ignited when he punished her in *Die Walküre*. It also destroys any semblance of a romantic encounter, which certainly was quite absent when Siegfried embraces Brünnhilde in that boxed-up position. I saw no Godly serenity getting lost in any blaze of passion – but then the orchestra made up for this visual dimensional deficiency.

And Wagner's words still ring in my ears – how Brünnhilde rejects immortality, farewells eternal Valhalla and prepares laughingly to meet her doom, to embrace 'leuchtende Liebe' – 'radiant love' and 'lachender Tod' – 'laughing death'.

This heavy stuff bids transcendence farewell – or does it?

him forget Brünnhilde, and then wearing the Tarnhelm he returns as Gunther to seduce Brünnhilde and make her Gunther's bride – and of course he takes the ring off her finger. All this is high drama, and it mostly comes off well, and where the dramatic acting fails the music covers such blemishes. To see Hagen and Gunther dressed in pilots' uniform gives the drama an authoritative-contemporary feel.

In Act Two Brünnhilde's love for Siegfried is tested to the full as she discovers what really happened when Siegfried took that ring off her finger. The tent is turned into a realistic double wedding reception hall and from where the treachery and its consequences unfold.

Act Three, the hunting scene fails the test because by bringing pistols into the action and having Siegfried hang on to his puny Nothung creates a visual dissonance that, again, the orchestra's performance softens. Still, Siegfried again shines through his performance, from telling his story to the hunters to Hagen killing him with a pistol shot. It's the depth and seriousness of this event that is not captured in the visual offerings and so the scene reminds me of Harry's Pistol Club: drink till 12 and piss till two!

Siegfried's mortal wound, his farewell to Brünnhilde, and his death is beautifully captured in the music. The detailed burial rites, the washing of his body, is distracting from the emotions captured by the musical score. The ultimate aberration is staging the funeral service with both Brünnhilde and Siegfried standing together while the tent's steel girders burst into flames. This does not enable a clear staging of Hagen's dash into the Rhein there to retrieve the ring from the waiting Rhein maidens – Lorina Gore, Jane Ede, Dominica Matthews, who drag him to his watery grave. The fan-faring brass, the strings, and the drum roll at the very end certainly did justice to the overall musical score, and perhaps through Brünnhilde's grief we, too, have become just that little bit wiser.

And so ends the first of the three performance cycles of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*.

The Wagner Symposium

See [Newsletter No 730](#) for program details

This is how the event was advertised at:

http://www.melbourneringcycle.com.au/about/behind-the-scenes/news/wagner_and_us

WAGNER AND US

**A SYMPOSIUM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE
6-8 DECEMBER 2013**

For those interested in exploring the complexities of Wagner's *Ring* cycle, the University of Melbourne is hosting a three-day symposium entitled "Wagner and Us".

Scheduled to coincide with the Melbourne Ring Cycle, the symposium will consider Richard Wagner's continuing cultural, political, and historical importance to contemporary society.



The symposium, convened by Professor Kerry Murphy from the The University of Melbourne is jointly hosted by The University of Melbourne, Monash University, and The Richard Wagner Society in Melbourne.

Topics to be covered include Wagner in Australia, Wagner and Anti-Semitism, Wagner in the Theatre, the 'Wagner Industry', and others.

Invited Keynote Speakers include controversial social theorist Slavoj Žižek (UK/Slovenia), author and broadcaster Patrick Carnegy (UK), musicologist Eva Rieger (Germany), and Wagner specialist Hans Vaget (USA).

For further information contact Rachel Orzech at info@wagnerandus.com.au.

At The University of Melbourne site

<http://events.unimelb.edu.au/events/3557-wagner-and-us-the-symposium> the main speakers' list read:

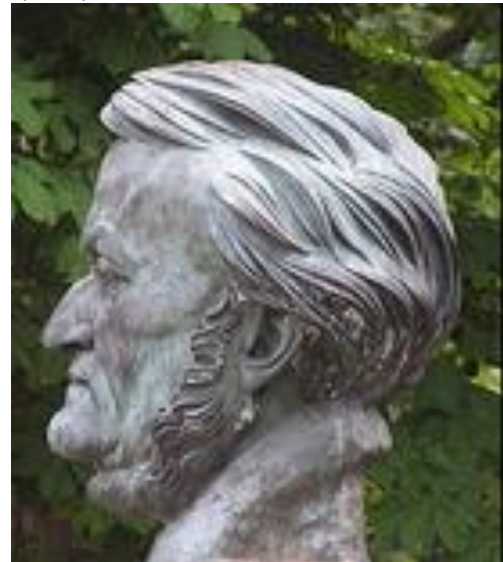
Wagner and Us: The Symposium

Scheduled to coincide with the performances of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, the symposium "Wagner and Us" will explore and critique Richard Wagner's continuing cultural, political and historical importance to contemporary society. The symposium is jointly hosted by the University of Melbourne and the Richard Wagner Society in Melbourne.

Keynote speakers include Patrick Carnegy (UK), Eva Rieger (Germany) and John Deathridge (UK).

Topics to be covered include Wagner in Australia, Wagner and Anti-Semitism, Wagner in the Theatre and the 'Wagner Industry' in a combination of round table discussions and individual presentations.

The symposium opens with a special public lecture by Eva Rieger and Dagny Beidler, Wagner's great-granddaughter, which provides an insider look into the Swiss branch of the Wagner dynasty.



Where? Melba Hall

Melbourne Conservatorium of Music

Gate 12, Royal Parade, Parkville

Host [Faculty of VCA and MCM](#)

The Symposium Speakers and Paper Abstracts

THURSDAY 5 DECEMBER:

Dagny Beidler and Eva Rieger:

What happened to Richard Wagner's first offspring Isolde? An insider look into the Swiss branch of the Wagner dynasty, presented by Wagner's great-granddaughter.

This lecture (with powerpoint) will focus on the family Beidler, starting with Wagner's first daughter Isolde, her marriage with

the conductor Franz Beidler and their son Franz Wilhelm. Franz was not looked upon as the legal heir after Isolde falsely lost her fight for legal acceptance as Wagner's daughter. In 1947, Franz Wilhelm Beidler was asked by politicians to take over the leadership of Bayreuth.

This presentation is an insider look into the Swiss branch of the Wagner dynasty, presented by Wagner's great-granddaughters Dagny Beidler and Eva Rieger. It will take the

form of an unemotional yet informal insight into facts and thus sketch the various characters of this truly Wagnerian "saga". The lecture will be followed by a discussion.

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FRIDAY 6 DECEMBER

Michael Ewans:

Two Landmarks in Wagner Production: Patrice Chéreau's Centenary Ring (1976) and Nikolaus Lehnhoff's Parsifal (2004)

Operas only fully exist when they are produced onstage. This paper analyzes two highly significant productions which are landmarks in the development of modern staging approaches to Wagner.

Patrice Chéreau's revolutionary Centenary production of the *Ring* (Bayreuth, 1976-80) was greeted with initial controversy, but subsequently, thanks to international television broadcasts, videocassette and subsequently DVD release, it has been seen by more people than any other production of a Wagner opera, and indeed probably by more people than any other opera production ever. I shall examine its strengths, and ask why it is so significant, and has been so influential. I shall argue that Chéreau has used his stagecraft to completely *re-form* all our previously held images and interpretations of the cycle.

Nikolaus Lehnhoff's staging of *Parsifal* (London, Los Angeles, Chicago and Baden-Baden 2004) is equally exciting. Chéreau approved of the socio-political message of the *Ring* and *interpreted* the cycle so as to bring this out: by contrast Lehnhoff dissented from a central aspect of the composer's vision in *Parsifal* and *challenged* it. He set the whole 'sacred stage festival play' in a bleak landscape, and substantially changed the action of the final scene. In this production, the director makes us both accept the strengths and confront the problems of *Parsifal*, and I shall argue that by his reimagining of the role of Kundry in Act III Lehnhoff has rescued Wagner's last music drama for the twenty-first century.

*

Michael Christoforidis:

Wagner, fin-de-siècle Spanish music & the Moor's last sigh

By the late 1880s Wagner's operas were regularly making their way onto the stages of Barcelona's Liceo and, to a lesser extent, Madrid's Teatro Real. These productions coincided with the intensification of debates over the state and future of Spanish opera, in a period when full-length Spanish works (zarzuela grande and opera) were struggling to gain a foothold in the repertory. The main ideologues of Spanish opera engaged critically with Wagner's music and its suitability in terms of providing a template for their nationalist aspirations, the most prominent example of which was Felipe Pedrell's *Por nuestra música* (1891), a manifesto written to coincide with the launch of his operatic trilogy *Los Pirineos*. While Pedrell and some Catalan composers displayed a marked preference for Wagnerian historical themes and musical techniques in their operas, Wagner's influence on Spanish music was more widespread and was central to the evolution of instrumental and orchestral music of the new Spanish school. This is most apparent in the fin-de-siècle musical constructions of Alhambrism, which encompassed the nostalgia and longing for Spain's Moorish past. It will also be argued that French symbolism and Catalan modernisme were crucial to the uptake of Wagner's ideas by Spanish musicians. This paper will explore Wagner's Spanish legacy with reference to passages

from key operas and instrumental works by two of Pedrell's foremost students: Isaac Albéniz and Manuel de Falla.

*

John Deathridge:

Power & violence in the Ring

Reluctant musicology and Wagner's fraught legacy are still playing their role in a largely inchoate conversation about him. This paper considers whether a new intellectual translation of Wagner into the 21st century is still possible. It takes the issue of power and violence as a starting point, a subject that has preoccupied intellectuals, with scant mention of Wagner however, since Walter Benjamin's problematic essay "Critique of Violence" (1921). I will argue that Wagner, like his renegade student Nietzsche, and especially in the light of how power and violence are represented in *The Ring*, is a significant precursor of recent thought that claims in part to reach beyond humanism, an aspect of his work that helps to explain the antipathy of humanist thinkers to archival research on Wagner, an area where surprising facts have yet to be discussed properly, and to a frank analysis of his theories and dramas.

[**FToben:** John Deathridge does not mention the fact that Wagner broke with Nietzsche when the latter's doctor revealed to Wagner Nietzsche was a homosexual. Why not mention this fact? What about the violence in Shakespeare, Dante, Chaucer, or even in the Bible, et al? Is it not a fact that the definition of a drama is still – conflict? Violence has been one of humanities' long-standing vice, so there's nothing new in this thought, except that latent anti-Germanism, which is never directly addressed, except through references about Hitler and the Nazis and Auschwitz, etc. etc.]

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Robert Gibson:

Building (and Rebuilding) the Wagner Brand

In 1886 *Tristan und Isolde* was performed at the Bayreuth Festival for the first time. Over the next decade Bayreuth gradually introduced more works into the schedule: *Meistersinger*, *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin* and, coinciding with the 20th anniversary of the inaugural festival, a new production of the *Ring* in 1896. *Parsifal*, of course, was a fixture and was performed every festival. By the end of the century demand for tickets to Bayreuth exceeded supply.

In 1886 Coca-Cola poured its first drink, launched its distinctive trademark in the famous cursive font and set about building a brand that would conquer the world. Other household brands that were launched at around the same time include Campbell's soup and Quaker oats. Indeed, the 1880s marked the beginning of the modern age of brands and branding.

This paper places Wagner and the Wagner Industry – the Bayreuth Festival in particular – within the history of branding and marketing. It builds upon recent studies in this area but focuses in particular on nuances of brand identity as shaped by the custodians of the festival in its early years and examines the ways in which the Wagner brand evolved in the decades that followed. As befitting a powerful and enduring brand, myth and mystique were crucial to the Bayreuth project. Finally, it addresses processes of rebranding that took place with the relaunch of the Bayreuth Festival in 1951 – an exercise which, like all good marketing strategies, even came up with its own slogan: 'Hier gilt's der Kunst'.

*

Sophie Boyd-Hurrell:

Composing Sovereignty: Modern Political Formations in Wagner's Music

Wagner's flagrant anti-Semitism and his posthumous elevation to Fascist cultural icon par excellence continue to impact upon the reception of his work. Adorno's small volume *In Search of Wagner* can be considered both a critique and a rescue of Wagner's musical works; an attempt to come to terms with the political reality of Wagner's project whilst sifting through his musical materials in search of their radical possibilities. For Adorno, Wagner's anti-Semitism finds expression through his personality and his works, and Adorno identifies the particular musical elements of Wagner's style that enabled such ready appropriation by the National Socialists. Importantly, however, Adorno also points to the ways in which, despite the composer's intent, Wagner's musical materials might enable sites of resistance to such forces of oppression. The recurring theme developed throughout *In Search of Wagner* is the concealment of origins; the social content of Wagner's obsession with unearthing the (imagined) pure origins of music makes a vengeful return as the (imagined) pure origins of the political community in the twentieth century. This paper will consider Adorno's Wagner critique in relation to the more recent turn to questions of 'bare' and 'creaturely' life within critical theory, in which the concealment of origins (particularly the ephemeral grounding of sovereignty and law) continues to be a central theme. If, as Adorno wrote, 'the whole of modern music developed in resistance to Wagner's supremacy, and yet all its elements are already present in his work,' then Wagner's opus can indeed be understood to prefigure and anticipate the radicalism of twentieth-century compositional practices. This paper offers a speculative extension of Adorno's project into the present in order to explore the possibility that Wagner's music might herald some particular political configurations of our times.

[FT: I pointed out that Adorno uses the Talmudic-Marxist-Feminist death dialectic while Wagner used the Hegelian life-giving dialectic, and that if there is talk of mass murders she should also mention Jewish Genrikh Yagoda, one of the greatest mass murderers, who was responsible for the deaths of about 10 million Russians. I then stated that Adorno needs Wagner but Wagner certainly would not have needed Adorno!]

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Luke Berryman:

Wagner's anti-Semitism in the Third Reich

In recent decades, many scholars have attempted to establish beyond all reasonable doubt that Wagner wrote his anti-Semitic beliefs into his operas. The precise role of these beliefs in the Third Reich remains comparatively overlooked, however. In this paper I review a number of sources, including musicological studies by Richard Wilhelm Stock and Karl Richard Ganzer, the films *Jud Süß* and *Der Ewige Jude*, and a variety of unpublished material from the Bundesarchiv, with the goal of casting fresh light on the significance of the composer's anti-Semitism to the Nazi movement. With the exception of Goebbels, there is no evidence that any of the Party's leading figures had read any of Wagner's prose. Equally, no musicological or critical literature from the time suggests that characters like Mime and Beckmesser were considered caricatures of Jews. Instead, I conclude that the Nazis' use of Wagner in their propaganda campaigns hinged on *image*. It was apparently believed that his public reputation as an anti-Semite would grant greater cultural capital to their racial ideology. This focus on image over substance can be

seen in the way that his works were used in propaganda. They only ever appeared as short extracts or rearrangements; or to borrow a term from critical theory, as simulacra. As we shall see, this method was not unique to Wagner but was characteristic of Nazi propaganda in general.

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SATURDAY 7 DECEMBER

Peter Tregear:

Post-Colonial Tristesse: The Reception of Wagner in Early Federation Melbourne

When, in 'The Perfect Wagnerite' (1883) George Bernard Shaw describes the eponymously named hero of *Siegfried* as "full of life and fun, dangerous and destructive to what he dislikes, and affectionate to what he likes... a son of the morning, in whom the heroic race has come out into the sunshine from the clouds", he might as easily have also been describing the imagined white Australian settler of the day; such quasi-Nietzschean language of praise finds many antipodean counterparts in the editorials of magazines like *The Bulletin* and is implicit in the Wagner-inspired music of composers like Melbourne's first Ormond Professor, G. W. L. Marshall-Hall (1862-1915)

Only a few years later, however, Marshall-Hall's successor at his Albert St Conservatorium, composer Fritz Hart (1878-1949), would begin to pen a series of works that mimicked the language and dramatic form of the Wagnerian music drama to very different effect. His setting of John Millington Synge's *Deirdre of the Sorrows* (1916), for instance was described by the young Graeme McInnes as 'mournful and lugubrious... all sorrows and no Deirdre.' Hart was not, however, alone in feeling more attuned to both the music and language of metaphor of a Tristan than a Siegfried (or, indeed, Tannhäuser or Lohengrin). A list of local notable artists similarly influenced might include Vance and Nettie Palmer, Christina Stead, the poets Bernard O'Dowd, Louis Lavater, Henry Tate, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Louis Esson and the painters and sculptors Christian and Napier Waller. What might the preponderance of such a reception of Wagner's later works mean? Was it simply a case of artists losing confidence in the 'heroic' potential of the newly federated nation or was it a reflection of an attempt to find a more complex, even honest, aesthetic response to the European settler experience of Australia?

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Sue Cole:

G.W.L. Marshall-Hall and radical Wagnerism in late nineteenth-century London and Melbourne

In 1891, the 29 year-old G.W.L Marshall-Hall was appointed first Ormond Professor of Music at the University of Melbourne. He was a self-styled Wagnerian, and his advocacy of promotion of Wagner and his music made an important contribution to musical life in Melbourne. Marshall-Hall was, however, in many ways an odd choice for the Ormond Chair. He was young, bohemian and largely self-taught; his friend and fellow-Wagnerian John F. Runciman described him as 'a young musician who is no-one particular here, who earned his bread by journalism and teaching and had a painful habit of uttering disagreeable truths about the musical powers that were'. Marshall-Hall had little time for the middle-class niceties of colonial Melbourne and his tenure at the University was notoriously short-lived.

In this paper I will examine Marshall-Hall's passion for Wagner in the context of the intellectual and musical milieu in which he moved before coming to Melbourne, paying particular

attention to what it meant to be a 'Wagnerian' in fin-de-siecle London. I will argue that the difficulties that he encountered in Melbourne may well have been largely predictable, given the strong connections between English Wagnerism, bohemianism and free thought.

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Kerry Murphy:

Thomas Quinlan and the All Red Ring: Australia 1913

English entrepreneur Thomas Quinlin (1881-1951) came to Australia in 1913, principally to promote his touring *Ring* Cycle, which he named the "All Red Ring", since he planned to take his opera company to all the red parts of the map—the "stain of the British Empire". The company sang in English (many were recruited from Covent Garden) and travelled with its own large orchestra and chorus. It was managed by J. C. Williamson.

Although audiences were familiar with Wagner, in particular *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser*, for the majority, the *Ring* was largely unknown. Most Australians were ignorant of the Wagnerian polemics and debates that spread throughout Europe in the later part of the 19th century, and this meant that their expectations of a work such as the *Ring* were, by and large, different from those of European audiences. For instance, audiences with limited knowledge of the aesthetic debates about Wagner that had raged in the European press, came, for the most part, with "innocent ears"—their expectations were built on their own personal experiences of Wagner's music, not on polemics.

Wagner's music was extremely popular in Australia and 1913 season was an immense success, as one critic put it "Mr Quinlin has added an important chapter to the history of music in the Commonwealth". This paper investigates the impact of Australia's geographical isolation on the reception of Quinlin's *Ring* and also the reaction to its promotion as a self-consciously styled export from and for the British Empire.

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David Larkin:

"Do you not hear and see it?": Wagner's Tristan in Lars von Trier's Melancholia (2011)

When asked why he used Wagner's music in his 1987 film, *Epidemic*, the Danish director Lars von Trier responded: 'Because it's very bombastic music. To me it perfectly corresponds to film music.' From his first feature-length film, when he played Wagner's music on the set to create the appropriate atmosphere, Von Trier has shown a particular affinity for Wagner. This is most evident in the recent *Melancholia* (2011), which is saturated with music from the *Prelude to Tristan und Isolde*. In this paper, I will discuss the nature of the connection between this film and Wagner's art, which goes well beyond the aural surface. It will be shown *Melancholia* bears strong affinities to Wagnerian music drama, both in its structure (it has clear Act-like divisions, and is preceded by a short prelude which encapsulates the action), and in its aesthetic (at one point the female protagonist, played by Kirsten Dunst, proclaims the lines: 'The earth is evil. No one will miss it', a Schopenhauerian attitude that also permeates *Tristan*). The way in which the *Prelude* is sampled will also be explored: it is heard nearly complete in the opening sequence, and thereafter brief, discontinuous excerpts are deployed throughout. This will be compared to the use of snatches of the *Tannhäuser* Overture in *Epidemic*. In one important scene in the latter film, Von Trier, who plays the role of a screen-writer, actually discusses the deployment of

Wagner's music in the scenario, and this will be used to evaluate his approach more generally.

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James Deaville:

Not beyond Good and Evil: Ken Russell's Wagner

Recently deceased filmmaker Ken Russell (1927-2010) prominently featured Wagner in his film *Lisztomania* (1976). This cinematic portrayal of the composer has understandably not found much resonance in the Wagner community, whether academic or popular, because Russell presents the composer in an ostensibly unsympathetic light, as a vampiric Nazi, who is building a monster to kill Jews. In an attempt to justify this treatment of Wagner, John Tibbetts argues that "Liszt was exploited by Wagner," (2006, 198) though he must admit that "even Ken Russell cannot entirely avoid the accusation of carrying things too far." The question then arises, how are we to view Russell's Wagner? Should we read the Wagner of *Lisztomania* as ridiculously over-the-top evil incarnate, to paraphrase the more standard interpretations of the film? Certainly the figure represented in the final scenes draws upon Wagner's own anti-Semitic writings and thoughts, as interpreted by Russell. But is there a deeper meaning behind the excessive parody? For example, is it possible that the director wishes to render Wagner so unbelievable that we are forced to take him in defense? And as a corollary, is the film really about Liszt, or rather Wagner? As William Berger writes: "The Wagner fan will also note that this movie, supposedly about Liszt, is ultimately about Wagner." (1998, 408) This paper will attempt to answer these questions through a close analysis of the film, and especially of Rick Wakeman's arrangements of Wagner motifs scattered throughout *Lisztomania*.

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James Wierzbicki:

From the Sublime to the Ridiculous: The Long, Strange Ride of Wagner's Valkyries

Amongst excerpts of classical music that have evolved into icons of popular culture, probably none has been so liberally interpreted as Wagner's 'Ride of the Valkyries'. The proposed paper traces the path of 'The Ride' from its origins in the opera *Die Walküre* through its current use in television commercials and computer games. Mention will of course be made of the music's familiar manifestations as propulsive accompaniment to Ku Klux Klan horsemen in D.W. Griffith's 1915 *The Birth of a Nation* and attacking helicopters in Francis Ford Coppola's 1979 *Apocalypse Now*. But information and insight will be given, as well, on suggested uses for the music in such 'silent film manuals' as Edith Lang's and George West's *Musical Accompaniment of Moving Pictures: A Practical Manual for Pianists and Organists* (1920), Erno Rapee's *Encyclopedia of Music for Pictures* (1925) and Hans Erdmann's and Giuseppe Becce's *Allgemeines Handbuch der Film-Musik* (1927). And—important to a consideration of the 'Ride of the Valkyries' as a pop-culture symbol—analytic attention will be paid to the music's function in films that are serious but not at all militaristic in content (for example, Fritz Lang's 1933 *The Testament of Dr Mabuse* and Ken Russell's 1974 *Mahler*) and in such decidedly lightweight animated fare as *Bugs Bunny* cartoons and episodes of *Courage the Cowardly Dog* and *My Little Pony*. The proposed paper demonstrates that, for better or worse, the 'Ride of the Valkyries' has come a long way since its first hearing in 1870.

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Patrick Carnegy:
With Helmet, Shield and Spear? How Wagner Himself
Staged his Works, and a Brief History of their
Subsequent Landmark Productions

Why are modern productions of Wagner's operas so unlike the ones he himself envisaged? With the help of many rare illustrations, Patrick Carnegy attempts to make sense of the conundrum. He discusses landmark stagings by Gustav Mahler, Otto Klemperer, Sergei Eisenstein, Wieland Wagner, Joachim Herz and Patrice Chéreau, with side glances at a weirdly wonderful film version of *Parsifal* by Hans Jürgen Syberberg (Munich 1982), and the Stuttgart Ring (1999-2003).

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Solomon Guhl-Miller:
Towards a New Understanding of the Wanderer in
Siegfried Act III: Wotan's Voluntary Moral Step
Backward

Much has been written about the dramatic and philosophical weaknesses of Wagner's Ring cycle, especially the weaknesses of the God Wotan. The crux of the problem is the perceived reversal of Wotan's "negation of the will" between Acts II and III of *Siegfried* by his seeming acts of self-preservation in Act III. This paper will reevaluate this commonly held view and discuss the scenes between the Wanderer and Erda and the Wanderer and *Siegfried* as progressive and vital components of Wotan's continued "negation of the will" begun in *Die Walküre*. The scene between Wanderer and Erda functions as a commentary on their original discussion, which took place sometime between *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, which focuses our attention on the differences between the past and present Wotan. The fight between Wotan and *Siegfried* is a necessary step towards Wotan's goal of ending his reign, as described in his scene with Erda. Only by defeating Wotan in a fair fight will *Siegfried's* future world order be free from the stain of Wotan's. So Wotan is not merely regressing to try to defeat *Siegfried* in a disappointing act of selfishness, he is voluntarily taking a moral step backwards, allowing selfishness to stir in him once more, because that is the only way, by honest defeat, that his rule can truly end. He must temporarily regress in order to progress. With this revised conception we may better approach Wagner's relation to the philosophic-dramatic ideas of his own day and those of our own.

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Daniel Sheridan:
A German in Paris: The Parisian Tannhäuser and Choral
Monuments

On March 13, 1861, *Tannhäuser* premiered at the Paris Opéra. The production has gone down in history as a legendary fiasco, managing only three performances before being withdrawn. Even in the lead-up to the premiere, the work and Wagner himself were besieged with opposition from numerous forces in the Parisian press. This paper examines the controversy from the angle of the opera's staging within the confines of a hallowed French institution devoted to producing "grand opera." Wagner's work, both in its original and revised form, displayed several hallmarks of grand opera, one of which is prominent use of the grand opera chorus. I intend to examine the chorus as an element of Anselm Gerhard's contention that the dramaturgy of grand opera reflected the increasingly "urbanized" conditions of nineteenth-century Paris. From there, I will endeavour to analyze the cultural implications of Wagner's employment of urban musical

and dramatic means, contextualizing the analysis within the contrasting German and French discourses on the importance of "the city" to the national identity. I contend that in the Paris *Tannhäuser* appropriated the urbanized means of Parisian grand opera in order to attempt to stage what Alexander Rehding would call a "musical monument" to the greatness of German culture and the "debased" nature of urban French culture upon a French stage, thereby claiming a German "victory" in front of French spectators. The Paris *Tannhäuser* was effectively positioned as a key battleground in a clash of cultures, with the anti-Wagner sentiment acting as the Parisian front, discursively proclaiming the "superiority" of the urbanized "French" cultural and artistic values.

[He did not appear but instead a video linked to:]

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Rachel Orzech:
'Where are we with Wagner?' Parisian Responses to
Wagner on the 50th Anniversary of his Death

In 1933, the 50th anniversary of Richard Wagner's death and the year that Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor, Parisian musical life was saturated with Wagner. While there have been a number of studies undertaken on the French reception of Wagner in the 19th century and up to World War One, little attention has been paid to the interwar period.

This paper will focus on Parisian responses to the beginnings of the Nazi appropriation of Wagner's music, and the ways in which the French saw this as a real and dangerous threat to France. French Wagner debates had traditionally centred on the fundamental questions: Pro-or anti-Wagner? But in 1933, the Wagner questions were different. Wagner's music had a solid place in the repertoire of the Paris Opéra and Parisian concert societies; an anti-Wagner campaign such as the one that had taken place in France during World War One was almost unthinkable. Wagner was too essential to French identity to be easily relinquished to the Germans, and while some writers attempted to give the impression that Wagner no longer incited passions in the French, it was clear that the Wagner debates were far from over.

[FT: Here there was no mention of the Jewish attempt to appropriate Wagner and distort his creative output through the use of conceptual prison words such as 'antisemitism' and 'racism'.]

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Katherine Syer-to be read by Michael Ewans:
1813 and the Ring: Echoes of the Wars of Liberation

Just months after Wagner's birth, Napoleon was driven back to France following his defeat in the so-called Battle of the Nations fought at Leipzig. Although German unification and independence, the dual goals of the Wars of Liberation, were not soon to be realized, patriotic verse helped keep those ideals alive. Wagner's war poet of choice was Theodor Körner, a Saxon member of the Prussian voluntary corps known as Lützow's "Black Riders" or "Black Hunters." Wagner knew well Weber's settings of Körner's popular lyrics, the most popular of which—"Lützow's Wild Hunt"—held special significance. Just days before his death, Cosima reported that Wagner sang "Lützow's Wild Hunt" as an angered retort to a letter he had just read promoting the ideas of the racial theorist Arthur de Gobineau.

Modern productions of the *Ring* sometimes highlight the cycle's political resonance with imagery drawn from the darker phases of 20th-century Wagner reception history. This paper explores the contemporary political significance of Wagner's recourse to Körner's poetry as he expanded and revised the *Ring* poem following the failed revolutionary uprisings in Dresden. The lingua franca of the liberation movement since the poet's death in 1813, Körner's lyrics are now barely

known. An idealist and a much admired artist-soldier, Körner was memorialized in paintings in which he was often depicted in sunny forest settings, reciting or singing his patriotic verses for his fellow soldiers. Siegfried's profile as a singer unlocks historically relevant meaning in this context, and sheds light on Wagner's concept of heroism in the *Ring*.

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Heath Lees:

A Challenge for Today: Bringing Wagner's Music to Life on Film

This paper deals with the speaker's 18-month project to bring Wagner's *Ring* to life for a wide audience through the medium of four DVDs, only just become available as *Wagner's Ring: A Tale Told in Music*.

A short *tour d'horizon* of existing films on the subject of Wagner includes a review of how well the composer's actual music fares in these presentations. Then the paper discusses the approach taken in *A Tale Told in Music*, relating it to what we know of Wagner's own presentation of his music. The conclusion summarises some of the difficulties and rewards that such a project faces nowadays.

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ROUND TABLE ON PRODUCTION

Chair: Michael Shmith: P Carnegie, P Bassett, M Ewans, C Menzies

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SUNDAY 8 DECEMBER

Eva Rieger:

Music and Masculinity: Wagner's subversion and affirmation of gender in his musical practice (Erik, Tristan, Siegfried).

Feminist research in recent decades has revealed the gender-specific construction of the production, distribution, assessment, appropriation and experience of music – including their specific marginalisation – in various music genres. It has also been shown that the myth of the oppressed, self-sacrificing Wagnerian heroine needs a new evaluation. The participation and representation of men and masculinity has been neglected, although in other disciplines within the arts and humanities, "men's studies" is a well established field. In this paper Wagner's various approaches to handling male characters will be explored. The construction and expression of masculinity in his operas varies from heroic images (Siegfried) to weak, effeminate men (Erik), who gets musical attributes usually belonging to the description of women. Tristan and Isolde are a special challenge as Wagner envisaged a couple melting into one another, yet he adhered to the patriarchal order by constructing the 'upper' daytime world as belonging to Tristan, while the 'lower' night-time world of yearning, lamentation and apprehension is that of Isolde.

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Michael Halliwell:

"Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks": Shakespeare and Wagner

The influence on Wagner of seminal 19th century thinkers such as Hegel, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, as well as the literary giants Goethe and Schiller, is well known and documented. Similarly, the influence of Greek drama on Wagner's dramatic aesthetic has frequently been discussed. Less well appreciated is Shakespeare's pervasive influence on Wagner, not only directly in his early adaptation of Measure for Measure, but also in the development of his use of themes, both dramatic and musical. Shakespeare uses imagery as a form of Leitmotif in his plays; Wagner employs analogous

musical strategies which reach their culmination in The Ring. The first part of this paper looks at Das Liebesverbot as an adaptation of Shakespeare, examining the cult of Shakespeare in early 19th century Europe and how this influenced Wagner.

The second part of the paper focuses on the influence of Shakespeare on The Ring itself where Wagner exploits Shakespearean situations and themes. Wagner's theories as expounded most particularly in "The Artwork of the Future" reveal his view of Shakespearean drama as a model. The play with the strongest direct parallels is King Lear, by all accounts Wagner's favourite play by Shakespeare. Most prominent is the correlation between the father-daughter relationships of Lear/Cordelia and Wotan/Brünnhilde. In both works there is an abdication of power, and its tragic consequences are worked out during the course of the drama. These parallels culminate in the striking similarities between the end of Die Walküre and the final scene from King Lear with Lear carrying the figure of his dead daughter, while Wotan carries the figure of his sleeping daughter who is, in effect, now dead to him.

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Peter Bassett:

The use of Buddhist and Hindu Concepts in Wagner's Stage Works

Eastern philosophical concepts and images feature in Wagner's mature stage works, and their relevance is referred to specifically in his writings and recorded remarks. Yet, despite their place in a number of dramas (Siegfried, Götterdämmerung, Tristan und Isolde, Parsifal and the unfinished Buddhist opera Die Sieger) they have been largely overlooked by stage directors and commentators. Their inspiration for musical composition has been all but ignored. This paper will argue that Wagner's awareness of eastern philosophies had its origins in Dresden, a city steeped in things oriental since the eighteenth century and the reign of Augustus the Strong. By the mid-nineteenth century, Schopenhauer had introduced the German elite to Buddhism, coinciding with the arrival of Buddhist sutras brought home by explorers. Wagner's encounter with the ideas of Schopenhauer in 1854 was a turning point in his creative life and saw the introduction of Buddhist imagery into the Ring, Die Sieger and Parsifal, and the Hindu Upanishads into Tristan. None of the operas can be fully appreciated without reference to these sources. Neither should one overlook the impact of these sources on Wagner's mature compositional style, ranging from the use in Siegfried of a theme originally composed for the Buddha in Die Sieger, to the aural equivalent of metaphysical concepts of the Katha Upanishad in Tristan. This scholarly gathering within the Asia-Pacific region offers a fitting context in which to take a fresh look at this neglected topic.

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Charris Efthimiou:

Heavy Metal meets Richard Wagner

The American Heavy Metal band MANOWAR described Richard Wagner as the first Heavy Metal composer in musical history. During the mid 80's a new sub-genre of heavy metal (called True Metal) came to being, the representatives of which considered R. Wagner as their patron and spiritual father. Apart from MANOWAR, there are a number of True Metal bands (such as HAMMERFALL, MAJESTY and SACRED STEEL) which glorified R. Wagner in an occult manner. Although a number of scientific papers deal with the sociological, schematic and non-musical aspects of this style (true metal), the musicological and analytical aspects of the music of true metal remained largely unexplored. The aim of this paper is to

give an overview of the diversity of heavy metal bands which cite R. Wagner's spirit and music as an influence and to document the reaction of the audience and the reviewers in relation to Wagner. Another goal of this paper is to investigate how much concrete influence the compositional language of R. Wagner had on the music of MANOWAR throughout their career.

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ROUND TABLE ON ANTISEMITISM

Chair: Peter Tregear: Leah Garrett, Peter Craven, John Deathridge.

FT: At two minutes before the session closed I addressed John Deathridge who had just concluded his remarks to a question by pointing out how anti-Semitic and racist Wagner's works are. I said that by using the term 'racism' to describe

Wagner's works, he should for the sake of balance also have to mention Jewish racism as contained in the Babylonian Talmud. The session closed without my comment eliciting any response. Prior to that Prof Eva Rieger stated how she finds it difficult to come to terms with the issue of anti-Semitism and Wagner's brilliant creations – it's splitting her mind, which of course is the aim of those who use such concepts in any such discussions.

Wagner, an anti-Semite? What nonsense! His home, Villa Wahnfried, he called 'my synagogue'. See: [Wagner, Wagner über alles!](#)

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<http://wagnerandus.com.au/list-of-speakers-and-sessions/>

DEBATE: ART AND POLITICS CANNOT BE SEPARATED



Wagner was an outspoken anti-Semite whose grandchildren sat on the knee of his most notorious fan: Hitler. [FT: What utter nonsense!] There is an effective boycott of *The Ring Cycle* in Israel. But Wagner is also a celebrated genius who transformed modern music, and *The Ring* is the hottest operatic ticket in the world. Can art and politics be separated? Where do we draw the line? How can we be ethical art-lovers – and does it

matter? This debate is sure to inflame passions and spark ideas, as artists and art-lovers across both sides of the divide – including Leah Garrett, Peter Tregear, Leslie Cannold and Stella Young – lock horns.

Melbourne Town Hall

Sunday 24 November, 6.30pm – 120 minutes.

\$20 adults, \$12 concession.

wheelercentre.com



Hosted by Lyndon Terracini, the artistic director of Opera Australia.

Speaking for the motion



• **Hannie Rayson** – is a playwright and screenwriter best known for *Hotel Sorrento*.



• **Christopher Cordner** – is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Melbourne. He has published

widely in philosophy, where his main area of interest is ethics, including its classical Greek and Christian tributaries, and its overlap with art and aesthetics.



• **Leah Garrett** – is the Loti Smorgon Research Professor of Contemporary Jewish Life and Culture at Monash University. She has published numerous books and articles on contemporary Jewish literature and culture and has lectured around the world on modern Jewish life.

Speaking against the motion



• **Peter Tregear** – is a musician, author, and academic. Melbourne-born, he completed a doctorate at Cambridge University, and was later appointed a Fellow. He subsequently held teaching posts in the UK and Australia and worked as a singer and conductor. In 2012 he was appointed Head of the ANU School of Music, Canberra.



• **Leslie Cannold** – Dr Leslie Cannold's expertise is gender and inspirational leadership. Her public contributions in these areas have earned her awards for [Australian Humanist of the Year](#) and multiple notices as one of Australia's most [influential public intellectuals](#) and [women](#).



• **Stella Young** – is a comedian, disability advocate and editor of ABC's *Ramp Up* website, the online space for news, discussion and opinion about disability in Australia.

The two papers, below, give an outline of what the debate is all about. Reports on this debate received on Monday, 25 November, indicated that speakers for the motion were represented more vocally in the audience. The problem facing both speakers and audience in this debate is that both sides believe in the Holocaust and base the discussion on its factual premise, i.e. Wagner's music was loved by Adolf Hitler and he caused Auschwitz, the gassings and the Holocaust! The fact that this premise remains unexamined, and legally protected from any open scrutiny, speaks for itself. More in the commentary of the Wagner Symposium.

The cultural counterpoint of high art

PETER TREGEAR, [THE AUSTRALIAN](#), NOVEMBER 22, 2013 12:00AM

IF we believed art were intimately connected to politics, we might expect to live in a society that would dedicate as much time and effort to studying and talking about the arts as it does about government.

But we don't, and it doesn't. For most of us art is a distraction from the stuff of practical, everyday life. It is essentially otherworldly, transcendent - whereas politics is irrepressibly (if not depressingly) of this world.

All the same, too often we try to make direct causal links between art and behaviour, as if it's as simple a matter as drinking coffee to stay awake. But it's not so black and white. It is in fact notoriously difficult to pinpoint how art might affect the way we think and behave.

For instance, in the wake of the Port Arthur shootings, then federal communications minister Richard Alston threatened a crackdown on violent films, videos and video games because Martin Bryant had such material in his possession when he was arrested.

But when it came to sentencing, the tabled psychiatric report revealed that the music he really favoured was "the soundtrack of *The Lion King* and records made by Cliff Richard. He listed as his favourite film *Babe*." No one subsequently suggested a crackdown on *The Lion King*.

If art doesn't necessarily encourage us to behave badly, perhaps it might yet help us behave better? There is a scene in *Schindler's List* that offers a compelling retort to such a (nice) idea.

An SS officer, discovering an old piano in a house he has just violently emptied of its inhabitants, calmly sits down and starts playing. This is cut between scenes showing the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto. A soldier listening to the piano-playing asks another: "Is it Bach?", "No, Mozart", comes the reply. All the while, the slaughter continues around them.

(In fact it was Bach, but that's hardly the point.) The argument that Steven Spielberg is hammering home to his audience is that an appreciation of the finer products of Western culture neither saves us from barbarians, nor makes us immune from a descent into barbarism.

It is, rather, precisely the elevated-above-politics status that we accord to great works of art in particular, like Stravinsky's ballet *The Rite of Spring* that allows us to celebrate it, rather than censor or condemn it because, as in this case, it was written to accompany the victory of the collective over the individual - or to be more precise, the annihilation of a young girl as a sacrificial victim. Like the operas of Richard Wagner, if we dismissed it because of its problematic context, we would lose to our culture an extraordinary creative achievement, without having achieved any practical political (or moral) outcome.

Even a more overtly "political" work like the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony is almost always received by us in otherworldly terms as celebrating universal, transcendent, values. We don't focus on the origins of Schiller's Ode to Joy that it sets, or the fraught political context of its composition in Metternich's Vienna, or, indeed, its appropriation by Stalin, Mao, and Hitler. We suppress this history, and, the complex, contradictory, context of early 19th-century European political idealism that shaped its birth.

We consider the finale of this symphony as merely a vehicle for a neutered Ode to Joy because we wish to believe its value and influence as a work of art transcends the politics of its birth.

As George Steiner wrote, it is figures such as Beethoven who, "on fragile occasion, redeem the murderous, imbecile mess which we dignify with the name of history".

So we keep art and politics separate. If we didn't, if we were thus made to shun all the art that was born of, or became associated with, politics we now abhor, then our treasury of such art would be greatly impoverished - and so would we as a culture.

Peter Tregear is a musician, author and head of the Australian National University's school of music.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/the-cultural-counterpoint-of-high-art/story-e6frg8n6-1226765551579>

The sublime and squalid cannot be separated

CHRISTOPHER CORDNER, [THE AUSTRALIAN](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/the-sublime-and-squalid-cannot-be-separated/story-e6frg8n6-1226765551614), NOVEMBER 22, 2013 12:00AM

THE world's most acclaimed opera, Wagner's Ring cycle, opened in Melbourne this week. It's also the world's most controversial opera. The composer's notorious anti-Semitism has resulted in an effective public ban on performances of his music in Israel.

Despite some attempts to argue otherwise, the Israel ban has nothing to do with the content or merit of Wagner's music. This locates the ban outside the usual scope of censorship. Israelis who support the ban might, without contradiction, play Wagner's music at home and think it would be wrong for that to be banned.

The significance of the ban is overtly political, not simply moral. Suppose Wagner had been a pedophile or a sadistic wife-beater rather than an anti-Semite. Some might no longer want to play or hear his music. Some might find the music itself spoiled for them. But I doubt there would be any thought of imposing a public ban.

Many will think it obvious that Wagner's music can be good, even though he was a virulent anti-Semite: that artistic ability, even genius, is unconnected with moral goodness. Great artists are surely as likely as anyone else to be morally nasty, even squalid. Similarly, someone can respond fully to the greatest art and be morally brutal or squalid.

But it is not so simple. This may seem elitist, but in my view there is a difference - indeed a gulf - between great art and the mass of worthwhile stuff. I was reminded of this in the Uffizi Gallery last year. In room after room of urbane, civilised and very fine achievements of high late-Renaissance culture, there was nothing that would lead one to say: whoever painted this could not have been a willing party to (for example) sexist or racist or colonial brutality and exploitation. Civilised Western cultures are, after all, well known for such

things: not as regrettable perversions of their fundamental values but as direct (if one-sided) expressions of their will to flourish and dominate.

But it is different with (for example) Botticelli's Primavera, or Birth of Venus, or some of the late Rembrandts in the gallery. I do not insist that Botticelli or Rembrandt could not have done bad things or had any serious moral vices. But not while they were open to the creative love that flowed through them when they created such works. If, at each moment of their lives, they were open to what moved them in the process of creating those works, then they could not behave viciously.

There is a deep incompatibility between such wonderful affirmative creative generosity and moral viciousness - but a human being can be the site of both, because human beings are complex and inconstant creatures. Likewise, any witness who remained fully responsive to the profound creative love informing the greatest art also could not be vicious. But our all-too-human fears and obsessions can distance any of us from that responsiveness.

Issues about art and politics (or morality) overlap with, but are not the same as, the issue of censorship. I don't believe in absolute freedom of expression. Of course there will be boundary disputes in this territory. But these are a challenge for us to negotiate, not a reason for allowing just anything.

Art is not to be subordinated to any specific politics or any specific morality. But it can't simply be separated from politics or morality either.

Christopher Cordner is associate professor of philosophy at the University of Melbourne.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/the-sublime-and-squalid-cannot-be-separated/story-e6frg8n6-1226765551614>

Inside Wagner's contradictory head

[West Briton](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/the-sublime-and-squalid-cannot-be-separated/story-e6frg8n6-1226765551614) Thursday, December 12, 2013

SIMON CALLOW'S new one-man show Inside Wagner's Head will be performed at the Theatre Royal Plymouth from Thursday to Saturday, following a successful run at the Royal Opera House in London.

Written by and starring the eminent writer, director and actor, the production portrays the composer Richard Wagner in the style of his previous one-man shows based on the lives of Charles Dickens and William Shakespeare.

Inside Wagner's Head received four-star reviews during its London run and is directed by Theatre Royal Plymouth's artistic director, Simon Stokes.

There are many truths and myths surrounding the composer Richard Wagner. In this production, Olivier award-winning actor Simon Callow tries to show what Wagner was actually like, and what it was like to be around him.

Wagner was a mass of contradictions: a sublime visionary and a petty anti-Semite, a political radical but dependent on dukes

and princes, irritating yet charismatic to the point of commanding absolute devotion.

Callow draws on the composer's own prolific writing especially his racy, deeply unreliable autobiography, as well as the literally hundreds of books to reveal him in his many guises: the political revolutionary, the lover, the theatrical and musical innovator, the conductor, the actor, the theorist, the philosopher, the cadger, the creator of one of the greatest opera houses ever built. It was a life like none other. Using music, light, sound, and a torrent of language.

Simon Callow said: "To know Wagner is to become obsessed by him. I've tried to show how utterly original the man was. How shocking, how funny, how profound, how destructive. He is one of the absolute Titans of Western Art who often behaved disgracefully. I hope the audience will be appalled, amused and finally moved by the man. I certainly have been."

Tickets are priced from £10 to £21 and can be booked online at www.theatreroyal.com or by calling 01752 267222.

How Wagner's operas held secrets of his disabling migraines and headaches

In a paper published in the Christmas edition of *The BMJ*, researchers have looked at how German composer Richard Wagner's disabling migraines and headaches influenced his operas.

As composer of frequently performed operas worldwide, Wagner's medical problems have been investigated in numerous accounts and he even described his headaches and symptoms as the "main plague of his life".

Researchers in Germany therefore wanted to show how Wagner used his suffering to compose his operas, using Siegfried as an example.

The researchers say Siegfried opens with a pulsating thumping which gradually becomes more intense until it reaches an "almost painful pulsation". At the climax, the main character cries out "Compulsive plague! Pain without end!" which the researchers believe is a representation of a "painful, pulsating sensory migraine episode".

In his memoirs, Wagner gives an account of the symptoms he had in September 1865, the same time he composed Siegfried. The composer openly voiced his suffering caused by the "nervous headaches" he had while composing this opera.

Wagner's depiction of his migraines included a "scintillating, flickering, glimmering melody line with a zig-zag pattern" while a main character sings of "Loathsome light!" and "rustling and humming and blustering". The researchers say the music has the characteristics of a typical migraine and the experimental flicker frequency gives "important clues" about the performance speed intended by Wagner.

They conclude that Richard Wagner was "severely burdened" by migraine and used his suffering creatively "letting future generations take part in his emotions and perceptions".

In a video abstract, the researchers explain how "his pain is in the centre of his music" and question what his music would have been like had Wagner been treated for his headaches and migraines.

Explore further: [Got the sniffles? Migraines spike with allergies and hay fever](#)

Journal reference: [British Medical Journal \(BMJ\)](#)

Provided by [British Medical Journal](#)

<http://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-12-wagner-operas-held-secrets-disabling.htm>

WAGNER-FESTSPIELE

Castorfs "Ring" - Döner-Dämmerung in Bayreuth

Gunther in der "Döner Box", Hagen als Punk und viel verspritzter Alkohol. Volksbühnen-Chef Frank Castorf hat in Bayreuth seine Version des "Ring" geschmiedet - und erntet dafür "Standing Buhvations".

Von Manuel Brug, 1 August 2013

Das hat es wohl nicht nur in Bayreuth noch nie gegeben. Ein Regisseur geht am Schluss gar nicht mehr hinter den Vorhang, sondern trotz starr, die Hand in der Hüfte, auch provokant auf die Uhr blickend, der Woge aus Zu- und Abneigung, die ihm da gefühlte zehn Minuten von den Festspielhaussitzen entgegenbrandet.

20 Stunden, inklusive Pausen, mussten alle auf diesen Moment warten. Frank Castorf zeigt sich, wie es bei einem neuen "Ring des Nibelungen" üblich ist, erst nach den vier Teilen, am Ende der Götterdämmerung. Und wartet bei offiziell gemessenen 110 Dezibel Reaktionslautstärke (95 gab es für die Solisten, 100 für die Brünnhilde).



Hagen ist ein Irokesen-Punk: Im letzten Teil der Tetralogie dominiert das Flair der Imbissbude. Hier schnippelt Gunther (Alejandro Marco-Buhrmester, r.) Gammelfleisch, Foto: dpa

Keiner mag aufhören, weder der Regisseur, noch sein in Ablehner und Anhänger geteiltes Publikum. Die brasilianische Kostümbildnerin Adriana Braga Peretzki will den Sturen nach hinten ziehen, vergeblich. Irgendwann taucht der kleine Kopf

des Dirigenten Kirill Petrenko hinter der Gardine auf, die hebt sich und gibt den Blick frei auf das nun positiv begrüßte Orchester in Alltagskleidung – es ist ja sonst nie zu sehen.

Große Final-Arie

"Standing Buhvation", tauft ein New Yorker Kollege anerkennend dieses seltene, hier freilich schon viel aggressiver erlebte Schauspiel, das einen pointierten Schlussspunkt setzt unter eine Tetralogie, wie sie selbst Bayreuth nur alle 35 Jahre mal erlebt, zuletzt wohl 1976 bei Patrice Chéreau und Pierre Boulez. Das liegt immerhin sechs "Ring"-Zyklen zurück.

Wobei der strenge Dialektiker Castorf eigentlich nur gibt respektive verweigert, was von ihm zu erwarten ist. Und so ist diese "Götterdämmerung", die düstere Grand Opera mit Chor, Verschwörungsterzett, Trauermarsch und großer Final-Arie samt Apotheose im mythischen Musiktheater-Kleeblatt, wie schon die "Walküre" eine eher ruhige, oftmals statische Angelegenheit geworden. Man könnte auch sagen: Sie ist nicht fertig inszeniert, sei es in der reliefartig behandelten "Zu neuen Taten"-Duoszene, in der Siegfried und Brünnhilde auf Bierfässern vor ihrem, seit "Rheingold" als Nibelungenheim bekannten, jetzt mit einem Schrottkopf zum Ross Garne umgebauten Wohnanhänger sitzen. Sei es in der Waltrauten-Erzählung der wieder fabelhaft präsenten Claudia Mahnke in Silberlamé.

Im unwirtlichen Berlin der Nachwendezeit

Der Müll, die Stadt und der Siegfried-Tod. Wir sind nach wie vor im unwirtlichen Berlin der Nachwendezeit. Bühnenbildner Aleksandar Denic hat deshalb an einem offenbar einst wegen des Mauerbaus abgebrochenen Haus einen ostigen "Obst und

Gemüse"-Laden sowie eine "Döner Box" platziert. Hier schnippelt Gunther (ein wenig in Siegfried verguckt: Alejandro Marco-Buhrmester) Gammelfleisch. Mit dem Dönermesser besiegelt er die Blutsbrüderschaft, während die willfähige Schwester Guttrune (unauffällig: Allison Oakes, eine Tussi à la Castorf) mit Modefetzen und ihrer Isetta beschäftigt ist. Jeweils neunzig Grad weiter warten Feuerleitern, ein mit Blut, toten Tieren und viel verspritztem Alkohol eingerichteter Voodoo-Raum und eine verhüllte, an Christos Reichstagsaktion erinnernde Fassade, die sich im dritten Akt als neoklassischer New York Stock Exchange-Tempel erweist. Es folgt eine Industriehallen-Fassade mit "Plaste und Elaste aus Schkopau"-Reklameschrift.

Hagen als Irokesen-Punk

Hier hausen nur Unterschichtler: Castorfs "Ring" ist und bleibt, auch wenn er vermeintliche Götterangelegenheiten behandelt, ein konsequent proletarischer. Freilich ein poetisch düsterer, keiner aus dem prallbunten Leben von RTL II. Alberich, Urvater des Bösen (wieder eine Wucht als Prekariatpaket: Martin Winkler), verabschiedet sich mit Koffer und Kurzzeit-Konkubine. Sein quallig singender, darin aber mit roher Gewalt beeindruckender Sohn, der Irokesen-Punk Hagen (Attila Jun), führt zunehmend besoffen einen vorzüglich singenden Schlägertrupp in Schwarzuniformen an.

An dieser "Götterdämmerung" wird auf szenischer wie musikalischer Seite noch zu arbeiten sein, ansonsten war die Wahl dieses Jubiläums-"Ring"-Gespanns eine richtige. Sie

offerierte einen der wichtigsten Nachwuchsdirigenten mit einer brillant-eigenständigen Interpretation samt einer selbst hier selten ausgeglichenen Besetzung von weitgehend hohem Niveau.

Und Frank Castorf, trotz diverser Formschwankungen ein immer noch diskursanführender Regisseur im deutschsprachigen Theaterbereich, hat eine rotzig-rüde, auch zärtliche Deutung präsentiert, die eine morbid-zerfallende Welt vorführt; die pessimistisch ist, aber liebevoll im Detail. Man kann in dieser durchaus zur Abwehr herausfordernden Bayreuther Tetralogie sehr viel lernen. Sie hat Bilder geschaffen, die zu "Ring"-Ikonen werden. Castorfs "Ring"-Formel ist, dass es keine gibt, und sich irgendwie doch alles fügt und weitergeht.

LINKS

[Bayreuth: Wie Frank Castorf "Siegfried" an den Berliner Alex verlegt](#)

[Bayreuther-Festspiele: Frank Castorf inszeniert die "Walküre" als Cloud Atlas](#)

[Rheingold-Premiere : Bei Castorf kann man die Götter spucken sehen](#)

[Wagner-Festspiele: Auftakt in Bayreuth provoziert Angela Merkel](#)

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<http://www.morgenpost.de/kultur/berlinkultur/article/118614965/Castorfs-Ring-Doener-Daemmerung-in-Bayreuth.html>

A final decisive concluding word from Andrew Gray:

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ERRORS, LIES AND NONSENSE ABOUT WAGNER

[Delivered at Adelaide Institute's International Revisionist Symposium, 9 August 1998.

From: No 84, Adelaide Institute Online, December 1998]

Nobody blames Lenin on Tolstoi - and they were contemporaries. I think Lenin was 40 years old when Tolstoy died in 1910, and Tolstoy's later ruminations on collectivism in the latter stages of his life were useful to Lenin, who adored him when putting together those doctrines, or whatever one wants to call them, which resulted in Stalin's Leninism. But an entire world industry blames Hitler on Richard Wagner, and Wagner died six years before Hitler was born.

It's very difficult to characterise the fatuity of such a debate, discussion, 'Geplapper', or whatever. The Germans have also the term 'Geschwafel'. The German language has wonderful words for this kind of thing, but whatever it is, it is world-wide. It goes on and on and on, and as we speak here another symposium is taking place. And it's taking place in Bayreuth under the Schirmherrschaft des Bundespräsidenten, Dr Roman Herzog, and it's called "Wagner und die Juden". It's taking place over a series of five days, from the 6th to the 11th. We Revisionists are much more modest.

I'll just read you this from the fourth day of this interminable stream of guff, I'll read you some of the titles of the lectures. Professors have turned up from all over the world but the two main ones are from Tel Aviv University and the University of Heidelberg. And here are some of the titles that they are discussing right now:

Professor David S Katz is discussing "Wagner, the Jews and the Occult Tradition". I mean, you may just as well be discussing his dogs, for that matter. Professor Rudolf Behrenbach is discussing "Anti-Semitism as aestheticisches Program" — anti-Semitism as aesthetic doctrine. Professor David Lange is lecturing on "A mirror of the Master. The Racial Theories of Houston Stewart Chamberlain". Professor Paul L.

Rose is lecturing—this is on the final day now—"Wagner and Hitler after the Holocaust". Dr Dina Porac of Tel Aviv University is lecturing on "The Impact of Wagner's Concepts on the Nazi Movement". This is on the fifth day. By this time they must be glassy eyed. Even a friend of mine is lecturing. They've given him the time of 8.45 in the evening. He's lecturing on "Thomas Mann, Wagner and the Jews". If anybody at 8.45 pm is either sober or awake, it will absolutely be amazing. And the last one, the final word, will be by Dr Lana Sheshik, who is going to lecture on "Wagner-Israel, from the ban to the creation of a symbol, 1938 to 1997".

Well, there seems to be almost no end to it, but the one subject they fail to touch upon is Wagner himself. They deny it. I mean, that is what's completely lost in this unthinking and this monumental detour around the subject which they make.

There was in circulation in the 1920s an old League of Nations anecdote. It's partly apocryphal but it's apropos. Elephants were an endangered species in the 1920s. There was a League of Nations commission founded to look into it. It was a multi-national committee, and it had each member looking at some specific aspect of the elephant problem. The Frenchman supposedly took the elephant and the reproductive cycle. The Englishman took the ivory trade and its implications. But the longest of all disquisitions was by a Pole who reported on 'The Elephant and the Polish Question'.

You can always take a subject and get it by the tail. One can always indulge in some kind of subject completely self-referentially, and of course that is what has happened here. It is true that you can say Wagner was concerned in his life about virtually every conceivable problematic aspect of the civilization. Any kind of problem - vivisection was such a

general problem. He didn't like cruelty to animals. Any single aspect of civilisation was a problem and captured his attention. He certainly didn't like newspapers and he saw horrible dangers in journalism. I mean his genius was anticipatory in so many respects but I think he saw the age of the mass media coming, and he found the German newspapers of his time completely and totally irresponsible with respect to his own art, which they in fact were. But one of the things that Wagner research does now is to go back and look at the evidence. That at least is something - go back and see what actually was written...

From the time he got back to Germany from Paris in 1842, and from the minute he set foot in Dresden and began to announce himself, with what Bülow later called Meyerbeer's best opera - *Rienzi* - from this new beginning, he encountered a kind of massive distortion, hostility and really gratuitous insults in the public press.

It was bound to upset him sooner or later. I mean, this sort of thing is bound to upset anybody and it seemed to be from his standpoint the one thing the critics would not do was address themselves to the works of art themselves.

Then, you know, came Tannhäuser. 'Oh, it's Catholic propaganda', unbelievable nonsense from day one. He looked at the mass media, at these papers, and he saw great danger in this. And by the 1850s it occurred to him that there was a Jewish presence among the music journalism of the time - and there is no question that there was.

In going into Wagner's biography it is of course terribly dangerous to say anything in public categorically because the likelihood of error is enormous. In his life we have it year by year for the first 25 years, but then we have it month by month. By the time he gets to Dresden, we've got it week by week and by the time he gets to Zürich in his years of Swiss exile, we've got it pretty much day by day. That's the kind of scholarship that's gone into this and by the time Cosima starts keeping her diary it is hour by hour.

So the manner in which people write casually on the subject never ceases to amaze me because of the primary documents are all there. 5,000 letters, and there is now under way a publication of every letter he ever wrote. They're now at Volume 9 which takes you to the year 1857. There will be 30 volumes that will not be completed during my life-time. That's the kind of dimension of scholarship that goes on - and all this editing, every last letter is still annotated. So if you talk about Wagner casually there is trouble, you'll be in the soup very quickly.

Nevertheless, I will make a guess concerning the first real stage of his resentment which then took form in this polemic for which he was never forgiven - *Das Judentum in der Musik*. It came from his inability to get Tannhäuser performed in Berlin.

Tannhäuser had its premiere in September in Dresden in 1845. I'm sure most people know this work. It's one of the great gifts to German opera. It's to the Germans what *La Traviata* is to the Italians. I mean, he gave them the most German of his works. You could not give a greater gift than what he gave, and what he did for mediaeval Germany. If you go to the Wartburg today, you can see the second act of Tannhäuser, right there physically to look at. And it's difficult to understand why he could not get this opera accepted, really...

Why was Berlin so important? The reason was that it was the only German theatre that paid royalties. The German system prior to 1870 was tilted against independent artists and composers because what the court theatres would do would

give you a lump sum payment for all rights permanently. The lump sum payment that Wagner would get for say Tannhäuser from the Royal Court Theatre in Hannover was 2,000 florins, let's say. It would be equivalent to \$4,000 but nothing on which you could base an existence. Nothing on which you could buy or build a house of any kind. You know, Wagner did not have a roof to call his own over his head until he was nearly 60 years old. These are just facts, and if after creating works that have been the centre of the lyric stage ever since, and he managed to become a little bitter about money - think of the system. Verdi was a wealthy man by the time he was 50. The rules were different. He was blocked. He did blame Meyerbeer, the Berlin court theatre. Meyerbeer controlled the northern European stage. The Paris Opera was in Meyerbeer's hands. These operas were the central money makers, the central core of the repertoire of the time. They have more or less vanished from the theatre of today. It's hard for us to remember how dominant they were. And Meyerbeer - Wagner concluded it was Meyerbeer who was blocking the path intentionally. Well, the evidence for this is very mixed because Meyerbeer was terribly careful where Wagner was concerned and there is no smoking-gun tape in which Meyerbeer said, "I don't want that bastard's operas performed here". Nothing of that kind, nothing.

Nonetheless, he ran up against a stone wall in the Berliner Intendantz, year after year in 1846, 1847. I mean, he did manage to get *Rienzi* performed there - by that time he regarded it a 'Jugendsünde' - a sin of my youth. It was one of the reasons for his own money troubles and his own desperation which led him to participate in the Dresden uprising of 1849.

In the autobiography he was wonderfully candid, almost across the board. It's a very accurate work. It's often termed as 'here's Wagner spinning tales', this and that. No, no. It is an extremely accurate work, except for two matters in which he is less than candid. One is the extent of his participation in the Dresden uprising. I mean, he makes it appear in his autobiography as if he were a bystander and a cheer leader, sort of saying 'Go to it, I hope you win', and that sort of thing. But, oh no, no, he was the number 3 man. He was right behind Heubner and Bakunin. Three men led that: Heubner, Bakunin and Richard Wagner. The argument is about the charges against him - if caught he would have been sent to death. He certainly would have been sent to prison and he escaped while Heubner and Bakunin were sent to jail for many years.

There is a biographical question: Did he personally participate in the loading of handgrenades? It's an open question whether he was actually there, filling these projectiles with powder. That's the kind of thing that's disputed. It's very possible he was. I mean, he was not a half-way person. Once he did something, he did it all the way, which is, of course, what got him into trouble with the pamphlet that he tossed off in a couple of days of anger in 1850 having landed in Zürich, penniless and in exile, and looking back at the German musical establishment from which he was then banned. He did write the brochure *Das Judentum in der Musik*. It's often translated as *Judaism in Music*. That's incorrect. 'Das Judentum' is not 'Judaism' - we don't have an English equivalent for 'Das Judentum'.

If you read it, it isn't that bad. What he is not forgiven for is saying by implication that neither Meyerbeer nor Mendelssohn - Mendelssohn, whom he names - would love to write German opera but they can't. Why can't they? Well, because as Jews they don't have the right relationship to the two great roots of

music - the liturgical music (the church music), and the folksong. The dual root to a nation's music was folksong and liturgical music. I think he's completely right on that. And he asserted wrongly, as we found, Jews would not be able to compose authentic German music. Occasionally he was wrong. He was wrong on that.

He went on to say, for which he was not forgiven, because it was gratuitous that Jewish liturgical music is without any musical value at all, and added that whatever you hear in a synagogue is a form of gargling. He did write that and again when he got started he was not the kind of man that pulled his punches. The difficulty was, when he came to publish a new edition of his collected prose works in 1869, he insisted, against the advice of Liszt, against the advice of several friends, many of whom were Jewish - Heinrich Porges was Jewish, Karl Tausig was Jewish. Two of his pallbearers were Jewish, for heavens sake! He was not the kind of man who was going to withdraw it. Instead he plunked it into his *Gesammelte Schriften* - and he has not been forgiven for that either. It was a conscious decision. He even equipped it with another preface, a rather self-serving preface and an accompanying letter to Marie Muchanoff. That was typical of him. He was not the kind of man who would back down.

If one were to grab the whole subject by the tail, when you interpret works of art of this kind by stating that they reflect the personal prejudices of the creator, I often felt how grateful we should be there was nobody to take down words from Shakespeare's last years. We know so little of what Shakespeare said and did, what the man, if indeed he is the man who did write the plays - what kind of casual comments he might have made. I'm sure he excoriated the French.

In his later years, it has to be remembered, Wagner was in very fragile health. He had a very, very severe heart condition and his survival was really Cosima's doing, his wife's doing, who watched him like a hawk. I mean, just to make certain that he wouldn't be upset, he was very irascible anyway. The slightest thing was likely to upset him. She was always there to calm him down. That's why we have *Parsifal*. That's why we have the Bayreuth Theatre, because she was there in those later years when he was frequently close to death. It would be in the diary: "Richard has a narrow escape today". It was that kind of thing, on many occasions he would be close to death. So some of his writings in his later years and some of the statements that are quoted, are the product of temporary outbursts of irascibility. Which one of us has not at some time said things of this sort about anybody which are either irresponsible or boundlessly exasperated with different things? But these things were then excerpted and taken down and written, 'Wagner says this. This is what Wagner says. Wagner said this about so-and-so'. Not just Jews, on anything. It is entirely ludicrous to excerpt from a gigantic body of documents one line. I'll give you an example of the kind of thing that is excerpted. There was a fire in the Theater an der Wien, a very bad theatre fire, I think about 100 people were burnt to death in the fire - and they were performing *Orpheus in die Unterwelt*. When this was reported to Wagner, he burst out, "Serves them right for going to hear Offenbach".

You know, he didn't mean that, but this is the kind of thing that went hotly over the wires: "Wagner says they got what they deserve". This kind of thing has been going on for more than a hundred years and I don't know how long it is going to go on. But I think it's got to be said, the Jewish issue is just part of it. It's only a small part of it. I tell you what I think is at stake. Resentment and envy basically is at fault here because the gods did this only once. They'll never again

combine that kind of supreme talent of the composer and the supreme talent as a dramatist under one brow, apart from a few other things that he could do. For instance, he was a first class architect. His supreme gift as a dramatist has baffled academia ever since. I'll bet you at the University of Adelaide they'll have a course of the history of western drama but they won't have Wagner as a dramatist. They don't know where to put him. But he is the legatee of Aeschylus. He, as the dramatist, is the legatee. He is impossible to categorize. The size of his genius - Liszt had a wonderful term: "Richard Wagner ist ein Schädelspaltendes Genie" - "a skull-splitting genius" was what Liszt called him. He was certainly 'Das Jahrhundertgenie'. He certainly was that. We fellow Wagnerians feel he was 'das Jahrtausendgenie'.

The envy, I think, at the tap root of this general uproar - this endless, endless backbiting, this gratuitous malevolence, envy and discomfort is really at the base of it. Resentment, too. He said once to his wife - this comes from the diaries - every two pages there are little asides, she is very good at jotting down his casual remarks. She's a smart woman. She knows when he's said something memorable. On one occasion he said, "I robbed music of its innocence". What did he mean? What he means is what he's never been forgiven for, of course. He sees that human sexuality pervades music, all the way up to the most sublime realm. In this case he certainly anticipated all of psychiatry, all of Freud, effortlessly.

And second, the works themselves. He's the grand master of the sublime, but into the music is composed, decisively and inextricably a sense that the entire bid for transcendence may be in vain. You see, that's where *Der Ring* is. I hope you're going to get a good production of it. In an authentic production of the *Ring*, the fundamental question will be posed right away, and the fundamental question is: is there any transcendental meaning at all, or are we entirely subject to natural law?

What do you see? At the opening of *Das Rheingold*, you see the natural world in its most innocent stage, the three Rhinemaidens representing the natural world. Subaquarus, they represent the unconscious itself. That's the world before it was penetrated by human reflection and conscious intelligence. There they are, swimming around and notice the first line of *Der Ring*. This is by a man who is always accused of being much too verbose and going on and on forever, taking up time on things. The whole work begins:

Weia! Waga!

Woge, du Welle!

Walle zur Wiege!

Wagalaweia!

Those are playful sounds the two nouns have crept in - 'Welle' and 'Wiege'. What has happened to the world? Yes, language has entered it. What does it mean? Reflective consciousness has entered it. And guess what? The symbol of reflective consciousness turns up. What is the symbol? Well, it's an ugly dwarf. It's not a very attractive character in its early days. Why is it ugly and why not very attractive? The process by which reflective intelligence came into the world, so far as we know, was not a very clean one. All of this is understood by Wagner long before Darwin published *The Origin of the Species*. *Rheingold* was written in 1852.

Now, pay attention to the text, which unfortunately very few stage directors these days do. Take a look at what is said between Alberich and the Rhinemaidens who tease him, of course.

The first thing the Rhinemaidens see is he's clumsy. You see the stage directions - he has problems climbing on the rocks.

He's not very agile. He doesn't move very well. What he says to the Rhinemaidens is that it's easy for you - they do it by pure instinct. He's got to learn everything. That's what consciousness does. It compels you to learn to do things that other creatures do instinctively.

But he's turned down by the first of the Rhinemaidens, who represent the natural world and are indifferent to him, just as they are indifferent to Siegfried. The natural world doesn't care about us as individuals. Listen to the music in *Götterdämmerung*, Act III. That is one of the reasons why it has such enormous emotional force. The stream of time, the river, is entirely indifferent to the hero. Heroes come and go. The river and time remain - it's in the music. Only Wagner could do that!

What else does Alberich say? The first Rhinemaiden turns him down, and Alberich says "I'm glad there's more than one of you because if there was only one of you I wouldn't have much of a chance". What's the meaning of that line? He's accepted the law of probability as governing the world, the natural world, which it does. Probability governs our lives.

It is only when all three Rhinemaidens reject him that it occurs to him, well, the Rhein may move on but it's not necessarily going to help him individually - one of nature's horrible truths. And it's only then that the ray of sunlight pierces the flowing water, a musically sensational moment among so many - and illuminates the gold at the base - a large block of raw gold.

And please, directors, please, do what Wagner says. Let the ray of sunlight illuminate the raw gold. Please don't turn it into a municipal water works or something else. Please don't try to have some artificial symbolism of 19th century capitalism. Please do what Wagner asked.

I assume what you're going to get is a very spare, lean production here in Adelaide. But maybe you'll be lucky enough. Maybe they'll pay attention to his stage directions.

And Alberich stops transfixed, as does everybody, transfixed by the music. And what does that stand for? Guess what? Reflective intelligence itself is represented by this ray of light on the gold.

The gold is a symbol of many other things besides, and I'm not saying that the anti-capitalist interpretation of *Der Ring* is wrong. You can take *Der Ring* as class warfare, but that's not a central part. Reflective consciousness has penetrated - there it is, and what is to be done with it? Well, it occurs to Alberich, 'I can do something with reflective consciousness. Instead of chasing these women who won't pay attention to me, maybe something can be done with the brain itself'. And he steals the gold, and takes the gold and brings it up above the surface. Above the surface, that is a symbol of bringing it into consciousness. He takes it up to his factory in the mountain and forges a ring. It's been said that if a symbol is easily defined verbally, it's not a hell of a good symbol. The 'ring' has so many aspects as a symbol, we'd be here all day. But it certainly does stand for the essence of reflective consciousness.

It's Alberich who puts it to work. It's Alberich's ring. It's Alberich who finds out what you can do with reflective consciousness. What you can do is all kinds of things. You can put your brother to work forging the Tarnhelm, for example. Don't forget that *Rheingold* was written three years after wire telegraphy had been invented. The electronic age had begun and again Wagner catches this - he knows this. The electronic age is implicit and the Tarnhelm stands for that, doesn't it? Wagner gets the point - it stands for instant transferability - 'Er entführt flugs dich dahin'. He catches all that. The difference is that Mime who can make it, doesn't own it. He

can't control it. It is the one who made the ring who controls it.

Well, that's the first scene of *Rheingold*. We are off to the races for the rest of *Der Ring*. It just beggars belief that I have to read from people whom I know personally in New York or London, to say nothing of some others that Alberich is a specific Jewish caricature. If you want to believe that you can say "Very like a whale". If that's the way you want to interpret this scene, there's not much point in arguing, is there?

I said that I'd talk about errors, lies and nonsense. Since the errors, lies and nonsense are oceanic, we would certainly be here far too long even to get under the surface, much less to any great depth. I suppose this nonsense will be with us permanently because Wagner raises all the hard questions. No other composer raises as insistently as he does the basic fundamental philosophical questions?

For example, Parsifal, a work that I adore, I do not take as an assertion of the Christian faith at all. I take it as a farewell to transcendence, and the bid for transcendence. I believe that if you look closely and listen, you can see that Wagner leaves the ultimates open. He's much too modest and sensible to say categorically this is the way existence is and this is the way philosophical truth is. It's all open. Finally, everything is speculative, that's the way art is. You can't possibly know what Shakespeare really thought about anything.

You can take Parsifal as a farewell to transcendence, and that we have to consecrate, we have to bless the existence we've got because it's the only one. But you can use it as an affirmation of a divine realm, a realm of being other than the one we have. I don't think the case for this is terribly good, and I think if you listen to the music you will hear he has managed to smuggle into the music the agonizing doubt. What do you think the wound of Amfortes represents?

And the music represents the fatal doubt. It is a question. The question is posed, but I don't think it has any doctrinal interest. Wagner asked all these impossible questions - what is music? What is the relationship of music to society? What is the relationship of music to the other arts? What is the relationship between words and music? - just a simple aesthetic question like that. He posed them, he poses them all. Since his works pose them all, I assume that the controversy is going to go on and on, and I suppose it should. One would hope that sooner or later we'll get away from 'the elephant and the Polish question'.

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Richard Hornung: You very enthusiastically affirm Wagner, do you think that Nietzsche is a bit of an aberration when he clearly had a split with Wagner?

AG: Nietzsche certainly adored the man and his own life was one of the great tragedies of the time. Nietzsche had a failed love affair with music which was not successful and he never quite gave up as a composer. The products show, as Wagner said, a modest gift, but nothing that he could place much money upon, and certainly Wagner said, stick to your knitting. Nietzsche was a very self-obsessed person who certainly used Wagner as a foil to define himself. What really happened between them and what Nietzsche said happened is just a day and night difference. The answer is the meeting with Wagner was absolutely crucial for Nietzsche, absolutely fundamentally crucial.

Arthur Butz: I think it was about 10 years ago, English philosopher, Brian McGee, published a little book in which he claims that Wagner was right in his booklet *Das Judentum in der Musik*

AG: Who would it be? I should know, many people have suggested he's not entirely off base in stating what Meyerbeer represented - Meyerbeer is the Andrew Lloyd Webber of his time. Wagner was vindicated in the artistic ideals he opposed to Meyerbeer's. He won across the board. Again, part of the resentment is that those who criticised him took such a beating. Those who fought on the barricades against him took a horrible beating, and still do. I'm sure there's been a public protest that Das Judentum in der Musik is not the kind of brochure other people say. It has nothing to do with a political program of any kind. It has nothing whatever to do with National Socialism, nothing, nothing.

Andrew Gray's translation of Richard Wagner's autobiography *Mein Leben*, is still available.

My Life

Paperback – September 1, 1992

By Richard Wagner Author, Mary Whittall Ed., Andrew Gray Transl.

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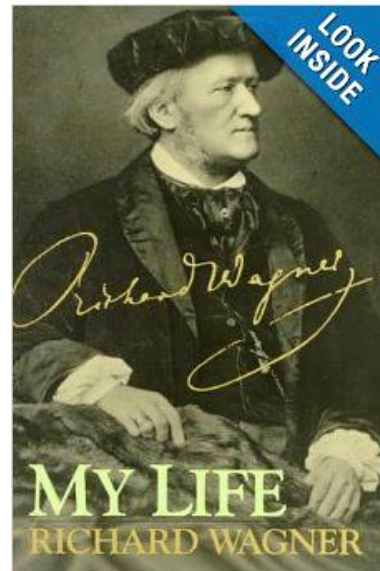
Written for Wagner's second wife, Cosima, and his patron, King Ludwig II, "My Life" runs from the composer's birth in 1813 up to 1864, and presents a sweeping view of Wagner's times and contemporaries, as well as offering a unique perspective on his operas. This is the 1983 translation.

FT: - responds to a comment on Amazon's page:

Andrew Gray's translation is still the best in English - and I'm not saying this because I knew him well.

I just attended the Melbourne Ring Cycle and the accompanying Symposium, which was a disaster as far as the matter of Wagner's so-called antisemitism is concerned.

I was critical of those speakers who attempted to place Wagner and his creative output in that conceptual prison called 'antisemitism' and 'racism'.



Like Shakespeare, Wagner was beyond, transcended such concepts - but those who are driven by concepts such as 'ego', 'pompous, arrogant, self-centered, not very bright and boring to death' do not grasp the universality of this skull-splitting genius.

Wagner's music is pre-rational and words can hardly grasp what he fathoms with his 'Gefuehl-Empfindung - feelings-intuition' about humanity. His works solve the philosophical problem of transcendence, and he is way ahead of what Freud formulated years later.

http://www.amazon.com/review/RJ99YJ5S0PCE7/ref=cm_cr_pr_cmt?ie=UTF8&ASIN=B001P06FJY&linkCode=&nodeID=&tag=#wasThisHelpful

Musica Viva

David Brockschmidt responds to three articles about music

Richard Letts informs us in regard to music education, *Advertiser* 21 November 2013, that music education affects brain development and accelerates learning in other subjects. This is known world-wide. What Letts fails to say is the difference between good music and bad music.

The Rolling Stones also known as The Strolling Bones, Marilyn Manson, Lady Gaga and the rock group Kiss, which means Knights in the service of Satan, and other musical and moral degenerates have not only destroyed the hearing of people but also the minds and morals of generations.

These morally degenerate low-life creatures are celebrated as musical icons in our free and democratic western world.

The world is still full of good music, from traditional folk music to Johan Sebastian Bach and of course the Gesamtkunstwerk of Richard Wagner. The sad fact is the barbarians are not only at the gate but soon in Adelaide, South Australia, the Strolling Bones will continue their destructive work in the form of acoustic terrorism.

Brad Crouch also addresses the issue in his article "Music can trigger your daemons", *The Advertiser*, 26 November 2013. He quotes Queensland University psychologist Dr Genevieve Dingle who claims music can trigger your daemons. Dingle says, 'listening to the rock band *Cold Chisel* can trigger booze cravings. Singer Kate Perry may make you want to pop a pill and Lady Gaga can cause both'.

What type of pill is Dingle thinking of here? Acid to enhance the destruction of a listener's hearing, mind or morals? Or is

she referring to a painkiller pill in order to treat a splitting headache, migraine or deep depression?

After listening to this toxic sludge, which is nothing but acoustic terrorism, there is little wonder that our inner daemons are unleashed, run amok and cause us to self-destruct.

But then, surprise, surprise, in this same article the Queensland psychologist states: "The music is not bad in itself, but its memories can be a signal".

This comment actually contradicts what Dingle is saying at the beginning of her article. But I can understand her to some degree because who wants to take on a multi-billion dollar music industry and become an outcast within academic circles.

Our music psychologist, Dr Genevieve Dingle, continues to tell us that "people in rehab can be negatively affected and relapse".

This acoustic toxic sludge affects every living being - humans, animals and plants in a very destructive way. She also informs us that the memory of house music can create the urge for ecstasy. Of course music can cause ecstasy in living beings, and not only in humans alone. Richard Wagner's Dance of the Walküre is a prime example here. But I have a faint suspicion that Dingle is thinking more of the chemical version of ecstasy. What does she mean by referring to "house music and its memory"? Is it the traditional house music where civilised people coming together and whose brains and hearing are still

functioning get together for a sing-along and/or playing musical instruments, for example, two violins, a cello and a piano giving justice to great composers' works such as Wagner, Bach, Beethoven, Hayden, Vivaldi and other great music geniuses who have enriched our lives.

I don't wish to sound high-brow or Eurocentric because a good folkloric sing-along will do the same for us. For the life of it, I really cannot see or hear how *Amazing Grace* or Danny Boy urge us to take chemical ecstasy. Quite the opposite is true! Also, this folksy music fulfils us with beauty and harmony, and it can also give us that much-needed peace of mind.

But try to explain that to the hearing and brain-damaged masses of our consumer-driven decaying society! To them house music is when a bunch of feral barbarians come together to do drugs and booze galore and listen to Afro-American ghetto rappers like *Puff Daddy* and the *Caucasian Eminem* who in their toxic music state that it's OK to rape your sister and kill your mother.

The West does not only need a moral but also a musical revolution. Last but not least, a message to the iPod pigeon brains who are loudly blasting their own gray matter out of their heads with. Remember, the sequence of development: first comes the iPod and then the hearing aid.

As a source of good informative reading on this subject I recommend the following two books:

1. Fabre d' Olivet: *The Secret Lore of Music. The Hidden Power of Orpheus*, Inner Traditions International Rochester, Vermont, USA.

2. David Tame: *The Secret Power of Music. The Transformation of Self and Society through Musical Energy*. Destiny Books, 1984 – www.InnerTraditions.com

1. Why teaching music is vital for kids

RICHARD LETTS, [THE ADVERTISER](#), NOVEMBER 20, 2013 9:30PM

IN Australia, primary school teachers receive, on average, 17 hours of mandatory music education in their teacher education courses. In South Australia it is even less. In Finland it is 270 hours.

What is 17 hours of music education supposed to achieve? One has to ask: Why bother?

No wonder then that [there is concern that South Australian children will not receive the benefit of the new national curriculum in music](#) ("Warning over severe lack of music specialists in schools", *The Advertiser*, 15/11/13).

In most government primary schools it is the classroom teachers that have the responsibility to teach music. Not their fault, but most could hardly even begin to teach a real music curriculum.

To give thousands of existing classroom teachers sufficient music education would be an enormous logistic and financial exercise. The best and most feasible solution, as your article says, is to introduce specialist music teachers.

You report that there are specialist music teachers in about 25 per cent of government primary schools already. Many of those programs are terrific and the schools would fight tooth and nail to keep them. If it is possible for those schools to employ specialist music teachers, it is possible for all schools to do it.

There is now abundant research showing that music, well taught, brings a great range of benefits to children.

Music-making appears to have unique effects on brain development, integrating the activities of many different areas

of the brain. Perhaps this is the reason that the benefits to children are so broad.

Prof Sarah Wilson of Melbourne University says, memorably, "Music primes the brain for learning".

A good music education very commonly lifts the self-confidence of students, supporting better performance generally. Some research shows accelerated learning in other subjects. Music education can also lead to greater creativity, highly prized in our society and economy.

Children develop better social and emotional skills. And they learn one of the great art forms and potentially open up a lifetime of pleasure and profound insight.

These benefits, of course, do not occur equally for all people or in all situations and they do depend upon skilled teaching.

Everyone agrees that literacy and numeracy skills are central objectives of education. But some see a black-and-white world in which other subjects such as the arts are intrusions.

Some principals cancel music and other classes to give more time to achieving high NAPLAN results. Is that what we really want for our children? Readers may be interested, then, in a two-year Swiss study that involved 1200 children in 50 schools. They were taken from regular classes for three one-hour music classes per week.

At the end of the two-year experiment, these students were "better at languages, learned to read more easily, had better social relations, demonstrated more enjoyment in school and had a lower stress level than those who remained in regular classes".

We learn to read because it is a survival skill but far beyond that, it opens up entire worlds to us. Music has the key to yet other worlds of connectedness; keen listening, emotional insight, empathy, physical skills, all working together.

You are never so together with other people as when you make music with them, in tune, in time and expressing the whole world of meaning. It is in the early years of life, especially, that we build the grounding for these abilities - and in our society, it is in the schools that it happens. It appears that the only real obstacle to the provision of specialist music teachers to all SA primary schools is the availability of the teachers. The universities should be encouraged to set up appropriate courses for specialist music teachers. We know that there would be plenty of potential students among primary school classroom teachers, professional musicians and others. This seems like a win-win situation for the Minister for Education.

Dr Richard Letts is the director of The Music Trust, the founder of the Music Council of Australia and past president of the International Music Council

<http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/news/opinion/why-teaching-music-is-vital-for-kids/story-fni6unxq-1226764574720>

2. Why music can trigger your demons

BRAD CROUCH HEALTH REPORTER, *The Advertiser*, November 25, 2013 11:11PM

COLD Chisel can trigger booze cravings, Katy Perry may make you want to pop a pill, Lady Gaga might do both and a house music memory can create a urge for ecstasy. Queensland University psychologist Dr Genevieve Dingle will present research at the Australasian Professional Society on Alcohol and other Drugs conference showing the strong link between music and drug and alcohol abuse - and how to curb it. It shows music can cue strong memories, and for people in rehabilitation those memories can be linked to substance abuse which stir new cravings.

"It is hard to name a band or genre because everyone is an individual but with rehab patients it can strongly bring

associations of times they were abusing, whether it be Cold Chisel with alcohol or club music with ecstasy, and that can trigger more abuse," she said. "It is an emotional response. Music can trigger strong emotional memories of things like a ski trip, school camp or a break-up. The music is not bad in itself, but its memories can be a signal. "Lyrics are also mechanisms - for example Cheap Wine or Cocaine evoke rituals around substances and people have said it has been a trigger to relapse."

The research can help people be aware of such triggers to avoid cravings. Queensland University is developing a "mood genie" app, where people detail what emotions are triggered by songs or genres.

The app would allow people to type in what mood they wanted - for example calm and focused when driving to avoid road rage - and the "mood genie" would select a song. "Being more aware of the power of music can help people regulate their emotional arousal both up and down," Dr Dingle said.

<http://m.news.com.au/MusicNews/pg/0/fi8997751.htm>

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3. IN DEFENCE OF HIGH ART/BEAUTY

[Kim Williams](#) , October, 2013

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Are opera, ballet and classical music valuable as anything more than sedatives?

"The mega-rich also work hard to separate their cultural interests from suburban folk. By any objective test, classical music, opera and ballet are insufferably boring. They have no social worth other than in the treatment of sleeping disorders. But that's how the elites like it, safe in the knowledge that people below their station in society are unlikely to join them in the jewellery rattling rows of the Opera House. Their abstraction from 'ordinary people' is secure." – Mark Latham

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I came across the above characteristically confident and entirely unsupported assertion from Latham while reading his critique of Nick Cater's book, *The Lucky Culture and the Rise of an Australian Ruling Class*, in a paper published earlier this year for the Chifley Research Centre.

I won't get into a discussion about the polemics between Cater, the *Australian's* former opinion editor, and Latham, the former prime-ministerial candidate. It's a task better left to those more engaged in the often tiresome parades of intellectual conceit between "left" and "right". These are commentators who relish the "culture and history wars" and the descent into simplistic binary views on politics and society. One of the ardent frustrations I have with what masquerades as modern intellectual debate in this country is the notion that there is only one correct way to think or behave – such slavish absolutism has many dark and ignoble precedents in world history.

Yet few assertions are as nakedly silly as Latham's declaration that opera, classical music and ballet are objectively boring. His opinion is not borne out by the social diversity of audiences, not to mention their evident delight and heartfelt engagement with the huge range of performances offered across the length and breadth of Australia every week. "By any objective test", Latham is simply wrong – and it would surprise me if he has attended many performances of classical music, opera or ballet at all.

Latham's new-fashioned view, which eschews high art and rejects it as elitist and removed from "ordinary people" (who

apparently are synonymous with "suburban folk"), is a dangerous strand in modern thinking. It is prevalent in many parts of Australia and represents a renewal of the kind of thinking seen in fundamentalist extremism here and in many other societies, in which education, science, philosophy, creative adventure and social innovation are under attack. Latham, who so often invokes Gough Whitlam's and Paul Keating's vision and policy creativity, overlooks the fact that the arts were as central to their agendas as, with Whitlam, suburban renewal and land rights and, with Keating, reconciliation and economic renovation.

Neither of these leaders was in any way shy about the fact that intellectual and cultural pursuits underpin a sophisticated and lively society. An acquired appreciation of the arts – especially the so-called high arts – has many ancillary benefits, with countless studies linking it to the capacity to think both analytically and laterally.

And yet, with a few notable exceptions, Australian politicians in the modern era all too often seem fearful of a populist media backlash when deciding on cultural policy and allied financial commitments. The sort of prejudice promoted by bullyboys like Latham is similar in nature to creationism, with its wilful sacrifice of science on the altar of personal opinion or triumphant, absolutist "belief". It demeans the nation. Enough!

These ill-informed and, frankly, uneducated celebrations of ignorance can no longer be allowed to go unchallenged. They do a profound disservice to the legacy of people on both sides of the political aisle (I only mention Whitlam and Keating because of the dimwitted way Latham slanders their cultural commitment) who comprehend that the arts are every bit as important to social cohesion and advancement as excellence in sport and science.

To take classical music as but one example, I would observe that the discipline acquired in learning music – study, rehearsal, focused effort and intense concentration over many hours – travels with you forever. The skills I acquired in my school days have been central to the work ethic that has informed my life ever since. Indeed, it is both fashionable and true to argue that music education from the commencement of primary school assists students in learning language, mathematics and the various sciences. But it saddens me to think that we are increasingly compelled to defend music by reference to these benefits because of the kind of brutish philistinism shown by Latham. Classical music is good for us. Period. It is good for the soul. It is good for human tolerance. It frees our minds. It reinforces our capacity to feel and understand.

Music, and the devotion to beauty it represents, releases some of the most positive, noble and life-affirming feelings that humans are capable of. The communication between composer, performer and audience is of unique value. Each musical experience is an end in and of itself. I simply can't imagine life without it.

I can, however, imagine a less troubled life – one free of the sort of ignorance spruiked by Latham. There is much to be frustrated and disappointed about in modern Australia, but it could have been worse: at least Mark Latham never became our prime minister.

<http://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2013/october/1380549600/kimwilliams/defence-high-art>